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LIBER NECRIS

THE BOOK OF DEATH IN THE OLD WORLD

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Liber Necris



The Book of Death in the Old World



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I HAVE SUPPED FROM the darkest chalice and have read the most poisoned lines.

The pale tangents of life and the shadowy geometries of death hold no more secrets for me. I have travelled all their paths and my soul has measured their terrible symmetries.

Just as the blood of kings and heroes burns within my veins, so too does the blood of daemons and of beasts. Indeed, in my long existence I have been regarded as all of these things and more.

No other life can be as fulfilled and true as the life of one of my kind, and no other being is more deserving of life's treasures than I. Lesser beings fear and abhor what I am, and this is as it should be. Mortals fear what they cannot understand and grow to hate those things that they fear and with this I am content. It is only correct that the thin souls of mortality hate my name, fear what I desire and stand in ignorance of my true nature and the nature of all my kind.

Yet I tire of the fictions and myths of mortal men. I tire of reading the histories and prophecies of petty necromancers and my insane brethren and forebears. So here I commit to vellum all of my studies and revelations concerning the history of my lineage and the nature of my kind, including those arts that have formed us and that we, in turn, have formed.

Within these pages lie the secrets of true immortality and redemption from the mindless dominion of the divine. Within these pages the future can be read if only, my unknown reader, you have the eyes to see it. For these are the revelations, discoveries and musings of Count Mannfred von Carstein, Lord of Sylvania, true inheritor of the line of Vashanesh, heir to the throne of Lahmia, and He who is destined to unite all the realms of men under his rightful sovereignty.





THE TALE OF my kind finds its roots many thousands of years ago, before the coming of the man-god Sigmar and the founding of his Empire, in a land far to the south, beyond the petty kingdoms of Border Princes and the ancient hold of Karak Azul. Referred to as 'Tar Uritharhain' by the Asur and 'Grimaz-Ankor' by the Dawi, the so-called scholars of Sigmar's Realm reference this distant land only as the Kingdom of the Dead.

If death truly has been defeated by the likes of my kind — which, mark you, it most

certainly has been — there is no place that the long battle to achieve this immortality began other than the Kingdom of the Dead. There is an amusing irony in this for this land was the cradle of human civilisation and its true name was, and is, Nehekhara.

Not many can speak of Nehekhara with authority. Few mortals have reached that now desolate land and of those that have, fewer still have returned to tell the tale of their travels. There is only one mortal that I know of who has walked the length and breadth of Nehekhara and has returned to speak of it. He was reviled by his own people as a heretic and



madman upon his return — such is the predictable stupidity of mortal men, unable to see the rare visionary standing amongst them like an unheeded shepherd surrounded by a mindless flock.

The visionary of whom I speak was an Arabyan prince by the name of Abdul ben Raschid, ben Moussad, ben Osman: the Great Sheikh of Lost Bel Aliad, Son of the Shifting Sands, and Lord of the Malaluk Desert. He alone beheld what no other mortal had for millennia before even the birth of the man-god Sigmar. Driven by the cruel passion of his curiosity and the pitiless momentum of destiny, Abdul ben Raschid wandered the lands of ancient Nehekhara for eight long years, recording all he saw within the masterpiece that he could not bring himself to name, but which history has named the *Book of the Dead*. It is to the few surviving copies of this great poem in blank verse that the scholars of the Old World owe their hazy knowledge of ancient Nehekhara.



As is often the way of such things, ben Raschid did not live to see the widespread horror inspired by his work. Whether it was because he sought to emulate some of the dangerous arts he beheld while upon his travels, or whether he was cursed simply by witnessing all he had, the prince died under mysterious circumstances, strangled while locked within a shuttered room. When his servants eventually

broke down the door they found only his purple-faced corpse. His body was said to have been so chill to the touch that it burned the hands of those who tried to lift it.

Terrified by these events and ignorant of the great value of ben Raschid's work, the Caliph of the eastern city of Ka-Sabar ordered all copies of the prince's book to be found and burned. Fortunately for history and seekers of wisdom, the Caliph was not successful in his destructive ignorance. Copies survived in the private collections of nobles too ignorant to realise the identity or worth of the book they owned. In time, the zealous knights of the Empire, Tilea and Bretonnia declared their crusade against the lands of Araby, and amongst the loot they brought back from their foolish escapade were copies of the *Book of the Dead*, though I am sure many of these knights came to regret their decision.

Ben Raschid's book speaks of a great desert to the east of Araby from which rise thousands upon thousands of necropoleis of all shapes and sizes — the crumbling echoes of the most ancient of all human civilisations. There are many lesser copies of the book, most of which with new 'facts' added and with originally sublime turns-of-phrase altered by the dim imaginations of lesser historians and poets. I include here several stanzas of the original, unaltered work, that I myself have translated.

In that dread desert, beneath the moon's pale gaze, dead men walk.

They haunt the shifting dunes of the breathless, windless night, brandishing weapons of bronze in mocking challenge and bitter resentment of the life they no longer possess.

And sometimes, in ghastly dry voices, like the rustling of sun-baked reeds, they whisper the one word they remember from life. The name of the one who cursed them to their existence of more than death but less than life.

They whisper the name, Nagash.



THOUGH IN OUR time the land of Nehekhara is a wilderness of lifeless sand, and the great river that runs through it is deadly poisonous and both the colour and texture of sour blood, it was not always so.

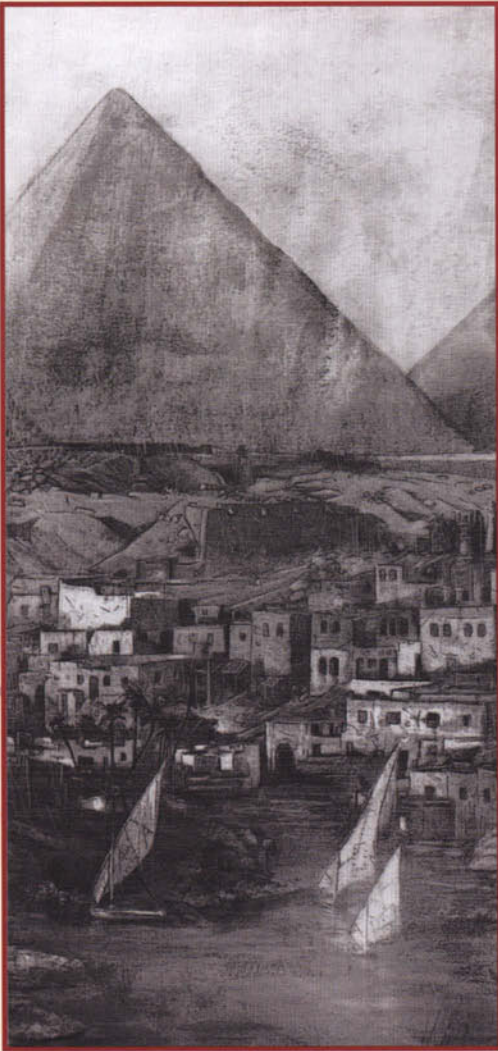
It is true that the cities are empty of life, crumbled ruins on the edge of the great necropoleis. It is true that the roads have long been buried by the shifting sands, leaving only a few toppled statues and wind-eroded monuments to mark their presence. The few travellers who have returned from this desolate land speak only of emptiness and the terrible fear and melancholy that filled their hearts. It is true that the land is lifeless now but it was not always so. I know, for I have walked all the paths that ben Raschid trod before me and I have seen and learned all

that he had seen and learned, and much, much more.

Three millennia before the time of Sigmar, a civilisation grew up along the banks of the Great River Mortis that scholars of ancient times named the *Vitae*. Five hundred years later, this civilisation found itself fully realised as the Kingdom of Nehekhara.

At a time when most other humans throughout the world were little more than savages, the people of Nehekhara had learned to cultivate the land and herd oxen and goats, and they had built cities, ships and roads. Greatest of all their achievements, this most ancient of all human civilisations had developed a sophisticated written language, the foundations of which, so their legends say, were first taught to them by the gods themselves — gods who walked amongst their





children millennia before the Nehekharans had built their first road.

The proud and strong people of Nehekharah conquered the wandering tribes of the desert, imposing their culture and beliefs upon all they met, unifying them into a great nation and binding them as citizens or vassals of their great city-states. From this the Nehekharans then drove the tribes of orcs and goblins far from their lands, until all the plains, deserts and mountains from the western deserts to the eastern sea were subjugated by the disparate city-states of the great Nehekharan civilisation.

At the very height of their powers, the influence of the Nehekharan rulers stretched from the steaming jungles of the Southlands, up along the coastline of the Bitter Sea and around the much-fabled Dragon Isles, across the Dark Lands through the World's Edge Mountains to cover all the Badlands and the region now called the Border Principalities and as far north as Sylvania. To the west the Nehekharans controlled or else had frequent access to settlements across all of the lands of Araby, Tilea, Estalia, and Bretonnia as far as the mutable borders of the Loren Forest. Never has there been one human civilisation so wide-ranging and pervasive as that of ancient Nehekharah — not even, or so I believe, the greatest empire of the distant Orient, ruled over by the Dragon Emperor who sits upon the Jade Throne of Grand Cathay.





JUST AS IT remains to this day, the greatest by far of all the ancient cities of Nehekhara was Eternal Khemri, and it was the first recorded king of this great city, Settra, called The Imperishable, who defeated the monarchs of the other city-states and brought all Nehekhara under his rule and the dominion of Khemri. There are countless temples, palaces and necropoleis scattered throughout Nehekhara that mention King Settra, both praising and condemning him in equal measure. He was, by every account, a great warrior and masterful general; a leader without peer in his time, though also a bloody-handed tyrant to all who dared question his rule. Settra was also a vain and bitter man, despising his own mortality and the fact that despite all his mighty victories and temporal power, death would one day rob him of everything he had won.

So it was that Settra embarked upon his greatest and life-long campaign, one I think aptly demonstrates the fundamental terror of all humans since the dawn of time. In his pride and arrogance Settra vowed that death would never claim him or his works, and he ordered his priests to find a way to ensure his immortality upon this plane of existence. For Settra saw no good reason to leave it and cared nothing for an afterlife in some spirit-realm where he would be subservient to the gods and their servants. An understandable desire if ever there was one.

The priests of Nehekhara were much more than the pale and brutal priests of Sigmar's Empire in this age. They were the holders of secrets passed on to humanity by ancient, and I believe now long-dead, gods. They were holy men, alchemists and sorcerers; masterful physicians, surgeons, apothecaries and daemonologists, able to bind minor daemons, or djinn as the Nehekharan priests called them.



AT SETTRA'S COMMAND, the ancient priests of Nehekbara bent all their considerable skills to the task their king had set them. For decades they experimented with flesh-preserving compounds of chemical and magic, and also communion and interrogation of djinn, and, or so it is said, the gods themselves. Throughout these years the priests of Khemri uncovered many secrets and made many great advances in alchemy and the delaying of time's ravages. Ultimately, the greatest secret of them all, that of immortality, remained ever just beyond their grasp.

So it was that Settra, though having lived an extended life by any normal measure, eventually lay upon his deathbed, spitting his terrible hatred upon the failure of his priests and promising that if such a way could be found to reach them from beyond death's veil he would hound the priests unto their own deaths and would await their arrival in the next world. Such was Settra's awful hold over the hearts and minds of his people, his priests vowed in their naked terror of their great lord to continue their work. They promised that the day would come when Settra would be awakened from death to rule his mighty kingdom as before in an incorruptible and eternal body. Settra commanded that the Mortuary Cult of his priests must remain in perpetuity and he bequeathed much of his earthly wealth to assure that this would prove the case.

In the wake of Settra's death, the priests of his Mortuary Cult continued their researches, managing to extend their lives for many decades beyond the normal human span. Many of his vassal kings across the Nehekharan Empire demanded for themselves the same fate as Settra, an awakening from death into an eternal life of incorruptible perfection and so the power and influence of the Mortuary Cult spread across the length

and breadth of Nehekbara. In time, all kings and princes of every noble family was prepared for death and the hope of resurrection with obscure treatments and arcane rituals.

As new generations of priests arose, the cult's knowledge deepened as their experiments grew ever more exacting. By the fifth generation of these long-lived priests, a way to avoid death indefinitely had been devised, though the bodies of the priests continued to wither and crack with their immense age, giving them the appearance of corpses dried in the unforgiving sunlight and yet able to walk and speak.



So it was that the entire priesthood of the Mortuary Cult became creatures known today in the most enlightened and occult circles as liches, able to tend the body of their kings and officiate over the Ceremonies of Preservation in perpetuity and the only citizens of Nehekbara's city-states who could not be executed, even by royal decree. In time, such was the power of the Mortuary Cult that their





word was often law, and the wealth and temperament of whole kingdoms became focussed upon the goals and rituals of the cult.

Blinded by their pride and united by their now culturally pre-dispositional horror of death, the rulers of ancient Nehekhar turned their attentions ever more to their lives *after* death, even at the expense of the lives of their loyal subjects. In mimicry of Settra's great tomb, the kings and princes of Nehekhar ordered magnificent necropoleis and pyramids built to store their wealth and act as houses for their souls until such a time as they would be reborn into their new and unending earth-bound life. More often than not, the husbands, wives and servants of dead kings and princes were either slain and mummified or else just buried alive with them when they died, along with the princes' and

kings' accoutrements of dominion and war. For the greatest kings, entire phalanxes of his most loyal guards sometimes drank poison so as to join their lord in death and stand guard over him until resurrected together.

The practice of mummification and tomb building spread down through society until everyone who could afford it spent much of their worldly wealth preparing for the after-life. The priests of the Mortuary Cult were only too pleased about this, because with it spread their own importance to, and authority over, Nehekharan society.

Soon, in the deserts beyond each city stood sprawling necropoleis, veritable cities of the dead and as the years passed these cities became larger than the great settlements of the living.



IN MY LONG life I have faced many travails and defeated many great and terrible enemies. I have tasted the wine of victory and withered under the chill grip of defeat. Through all this, my wisdom has grown, both of myself and the world I find myself within, and as such I now fear no evil that may befall me. There are those in this world who may harm me and perhaps even destroy my mortal shell, yet cautious though I am of these peoples and powers, I cannot say that I fear them, for fear is irrational and beyond control. My control is complete. The curse of paranoia and self-delusion that so blights many of my kind is not a curse I share and as such I do not fear.

Yet while this is true, there is one being whom I dread, one being whose coming and whose judgement I fear like no other. The one who is known to history, myth and legend as Nagash.

From the moment he was old enough to be aware of such things, it is said that Nagash was obsessed with death. He wandered through the city's necropoleis and secreted himself in the ancient tombs of great kings where he would watch the priests of the Mortuary Cult as they made offering and enacted lengthy rituals intended to nurture the spirit of the entombed king. When not in these tombs, Nagash would watch the ill and the wounded as the spark of their lives slowly faded and then the morticians as they prepared the dead for their internment. It was at some point in his young life that Nagash resolved never to die.

Few of Nehekhara's ancient monuments record Nagash's name or deeds. The ancients believed that by expunging his name and memory from history they would somehow deny him immortality and cause him to be forgotten to history. This, most evidently, has not proven the case. The few scattered relics that do mention Nagash say that he was the broth-

er of King Thutep of Khemri and yet was powerful and respected in his own right as the youngest chief priest in the history of Khemri's Mortuary Cult. Such was his obsessive paranoia, it galled and frightened Nagash that there was one with greater temporal power than he, even though that person was his devoted brother. In fact, so greatly did Nagash covet his brother's throne that one fateful night he drugged his brother and entombed him alive within the walls of the Great Pyramid of King Khetep, their departed father.



er. So it was that roughly 4,500 years before the present day, in the Third Dynasty of Khemri, after the reign of Thutep the Lawmaker was cut so abruptly short, Nagash was crowned Priest-King of Khemri and none dared oppose him.

Already privy to the secrets of the Mortuary Cult and its undying liche priests, Nagash was unsatisfied with the imperfect immortality those secrets brought, for though the cult's priesthood could live



indefinitely, their withered and ancient bodies were weak and brittle. Although they would die of no natural causes, they could be slain by one determined enough to do so — as Nagash had proven for himself upon the withered corpse of his one-time master and teacher, the last high priest. So it was that Nagash, along with his chief acolyte and vizier, Arkhan, began to undertake ever more unspeakable experiments in their quest for immortality.

Their success, however, was limited. The spellcraft of the ancient Nehekharans was bound up with their religious practices and millennia of superstition and the true nature of magic and how best to use it was unknown to them.

Then came the day when all this changed. As had been demanded from all the vassal kingdoms of Nehekhar by Nagash, there arrived from the northern city of Zandri a tribute of many hundreds of slaves; slaves that Nagash required to build a pyramid for himself, one that would be his palace and abode in life for he had no plans to die. Amongst the slaves was a rare prize indeed, a cage containing the tall, pale forms of three unconscious Druchii. The people of Nehekhar had had little contact at all with the elder races and knew of them only through legend and from the various tales of nightmare from kingdoms such as Zandri that lay upon the estuary of the River Vitae. For though the Zadrinites did not know precisely who and what the Druchii were, they had suffered long from the predations of pirate-slavers from the cold lands of Naggaroth.

The three that lay heavily drugged in the cage sent to Khemri had been found washed up on a beach near to the city of Zandri after a vicious storm. Rather than have them killed and their bodies burned, as would have been his more usual policy, the king ordered the Druchii to be drugged with a concentrate of Black Lotus and, while they were still

unconscious, had them bound with chains to the heaviest bronze and sent to Khemri as a 'gift'. This one act was to be the doom of all Nehekhar.



For over a decade, Nagash kept his three prisoners drugged or inebriated to varying degrees; too frightened was he to allow them to awaken fully. In this time he subjected them to the cruellest tortures and most probing interrogations his mind could conceive, with the single-minded purpose of learning all they had to teach him concerning their own much fabled arts of sorcery. It was well known throughout Nehekharan legends that the Druchii were masters of magics far beyond that of any human. The risk Nagash embraced so willingly is a testament to his ambition, for one of the captured Druchii was nothing less than a sorceress from amongst that most unwholesome race.



From her, Nagash learned the meat of his knowledge concerning matters arcane and, although his understanding of sorcerous ways increased one-hundred fold through his contact with the Druchii, it was yet imperfect. For his safety, the sorceress and her two companions had to remain in a drugged haze so that they could not gather their wits enough to obliterate Nagash and even in this soporific state, the Druchii still proved resistant to his tortures. Yet still, Nagash's knowledge of the ways and means of magic and its weaving into spells now far exceeded that of any other human spellcaster in Nehekhar.

He learned that creating magical effects did not have to depend upon beseeching the intercession of gods and djinn, as the highly ritualistic spellcraft of the Nehekharan priesthood did. He learned of the winds of magic that blow across the world and how these winds may ferment into the source of the Druchii's power: Dhar or black magic. He learned of the importance of blood as a carrier of the vital energy of magic and how witches in the distant land of Naggaroth grew stronger and retained their youth by bathing in the blood of sacrificial victims that had been laced with certain enchantments. Finally he learned of obsidian and the strange deadening effect it had upon magic.

Once it became clear to him that he could learn no more from the sorceress and having already slain her companions, Nagash mutilated the Druchii witch, putting out her eyes with an obsidian dagger, removing her tongue, arms and feet, and placing over her head a specially manufactured scold's bridle studded all about with obsidian. After abusing the Druchii in this way, it pleased Nagash to have her sealed alive along with the corpses of her companions within one of the chambers of the Black Pyramid he had ordered built in his name.

Nagash experimented with his new knowledge, mixing what he had learned from the Druchii with the wealth of knowledge the priests of the Mortuary Cult had already compiled. His experimentations met with some success and he managed to distill a magical elixir that would prolong the lifespan without the debilitating decay that so beset the liche priests. Soon the acolytes that he had drawn from the Mortuary Cult — Arkhan being foremost amongst them — were allowed to share in his discovery.

Nagash and his acolytes practised their sorceries long and hard, seeking ever more dependable ways to create and manipulate the black magic that the Druchii sorceress had introduced him to. Within a matter of decades their sorcerous abilities were unrivalled by the liche priests of any other city in Nehekhar. They abandoned the worship of Nehekhar's traditional deities, coming to see themselves almost as gods and the inhabitants of Khemri mere chattels to dispose of as they pleased, whether it be on the building of great monuments to their masters' achievements or just as creatures to use in their sorcerous experiments.

As the years turned into decades and the decades turned into a century, Nagash and his acolytes looked ever more inward, rarely leaving Khemri or caring about affairs beyond Khemri's borders — a state of affairs that was to prove catastrophic for them. Nagash's Black Pyramid was eventually completed, leaving Nagash and his acolytes to consecrate it with their dark sorceries. From that moment forward it would act as a conduit for the winds of magic, drawing them unto itself, binding them together and causing them to form as a great reservoir of black magic beneath the Pyramid; the most powerful and useful of all magics.

However, the black magic created and stored by Nagash's pyramid caused all animals and



peoples for many leagues around it to sicken with unnatural ailments of the body, mind and spirit. For the kings of the other cities, long disturbed by the events in Khemri, this state of affairs was to prove intolerable. King Lahmizzar of the coastal city of Lahmia caused the kings of Zandri, Numas, Mahrak, Lybaras and Rasetra to unite with him into a grand alliance against Nagash and sent their armies forth to war against he who had crowned himself eternal priest-king of Khemri.

During the long war that followed, many thousands of Nehekharans were slain. Waves of the blackest magic scoured the land and certain oases became so saturated that ever afterwards they would be shunned by man. So long was the war fought against Nagash and his followers that King Lahmizzar did not live to see its end, with his young son, Lahmizzash, taking up his father's banners of war against Khemri. After another thirty years

of intermittent warfare, Lahmizzash's armies finally prevailed against Nagash.

Cornered within Khemri alongside his few surviving servants, it is said that Nagash fled into the cold depths of his Black Pyramid, turning but once atop the one thousand steps that led into the darkness within, he swore that the kings that had risen against him would become as dust, and less than dust, as would their cities and peoples.

One by one, Nagash's disciples were dragged down as they guarded Nagash's retreat, beheaded and burned by the armies united against them. The surviving kings cast down all the works of Nagash, expunging his name and records of his deeds from Khemri's many monuments in an attempt to remove all traces of the heretic king from history. Nothing was found of Nagash himself — other than the rooms of occult experimentation, the pyramid into which he had fled was empty.



HERE FOLLOW SEVERAL verses that I have translated into modern Reikspiel from the first of the *Nine Books of Nagash*, written by the Great Necromancer himself.

I wandered through the desert, thirst parching my throat, hunger gnawing at my stomach. Dire visions danced before my eyes and I feared more than anything that I was to die amid those blazing sands, for not all my spells nor even the blessings of my Elixir bestowed true immortality. Yet I refused my fate. Death came for me and even claimed me, leaving me to wander in the grey after-realms until I found a way back to the mortal world and the drying shell of my body. I took my body and drove it onward, farther and farther away from hated Iihemri, through the endless sterility of the Salt Plains and on past the evil marshes beyond. Eventually I found myself in the foothills of the Eastern Mountains where I found myself drawn to the foot of Cripple Peak.

The shattered mountain rose from the shores of the Sour Sea. I knew of this area only dimly, for few had trod here before and told of it. In ancient times it was said that a mighty djinn had plunged from the heavens and smashed into the peak, splitting it before driving down into the mountain's core, where its body remained. Over the centuries the wind and rain was said to have carried the djinn's dried blood and slowly dissolving body down into what became known as the Sour Sea, poisoning its waters and corrupting those fish and serpents that it did not kill.

I knew that I had died upon the Salt Plains and that the body I occupied was but a decaying vessel but I possessed it yet, though my hold upon it and control over it was imperfect. If I held on to it too lightly, then it would not respond and I would begin to feel myself drawn away from the mortal realm. Yet if I held onto my body too tightly, then its ravaged state began to tell on me and I would feel the agony of tortured and dying muscles, and the insanity of a deadened brain. It was at such a time as I held onto my body with all my will that I fell beside the polluted waters of the Sour Sea. Before I knew what I was doing, the instincts of my mortal shell had risen up, and I found myself drinking from the sea in long greedy gulps.

At my first taste of the Sour Sea's waters, incandescent visions blazed through my mind and the rawest power surged through clogged veins. It was then that I felt my hold on my body tighten absolutely even as its desires and weaknesses were burned away by the waters I had drunk. I knew then that I had found at last what had been searching for. Here was all I required.



In his book, Nagash goes on to describe how for years he lived as a hermit in a cave at the foot of Cripple Peak, meditating on the nature of immortality and the afterworlds, drawing wisdom from the deep well of his soul, freed as it was from the pressures and considerations of the flesh. In time, he came to discover the truth of the legend concerning the fallen djinn that had supposedly destroyed the mountain, finding that it had instead been some kind of eldritch rock of huge proportions that had smashed through the peak; a rock with immense supernatural powers. Nagash recognised this substance for what it was, a substance that in these times superstitious men call warpstone — the blackest of aethyr, somehow solidified and made manifest.

Nagash explored the cave systems that riddled Cripple Peak till he found a lightless lake deep inside the mountain, within which the great bulk of the warpstone lay. Sensing that this stuff was the answer to all his questions, Nagash took to drinking the glowing waters of this lake and even powdering lumps of warpstone to inhale it like snuff to enhance his power, or else mixing it with certain herbs in order to make his mind more keen in its arcane questing. With so much raw power at his disposal, Nagash found himself increasingly able to summon ever more powerful djinn, or daemons, binding them to his will and impelling them to tell him the secrets of life and death and how to avoid the inexorable draw of the afterworlds upon a mortal soul freed from its body. For still, the one thing that Nagash feared was death and the one thing that he hated above all others was the idea that he might one day have to face the judgement of gods and daemons in the after realms.

So the years wore relentlessly on and the constant exposure to warpstone wrought terrible changes upon Nagash's not quite alive and yet not quite dead body. He describes how his

skin withered and cracked, in places becoming translucent, leaving muscles and veins exposed. His eyes melted and became pools of luminous pus in their sockets. His nails grew longer and became diamond-hard talons so that he could scratch out pebbles of warpstone from the compacted mud around the lake. Whatever traces of mortality that remained within him were finally expunged, though his soul was bound forever more into his shell of his corpse, driven by his implacable will and the subtle power of his sorcery. As he had so long desired, he had passed beyond death's reach, not truly living nor yet truly dead, but wholly undead.



IT WAS DURING this long period that Nagash made his greatest strides in the creation of his own sorcery that was a hybrid of the ritualistic spellcraft of the Mortuary Cult and the sorcery he had learned from the Druchii. This new art, which has become known as necromancy, was and is the sorcery of immortal life and the manipulation of death, a path towards an immortality free from the whims of daemons and gods. Through the years of his isolation, Nagash perfected those spells that all later necromancers would use, albeit often in lesser forms. Hence Nagash was, is, and ever shall be, the Great Necromancer.

At night and by the light of the full Chaos moon, Nagash would go down to the burial grounds of the primitive tribes that lived around Cripple Peak to practise his nascent craft. Those who saw him fled and the few warriors or shamans who dared oppose him he slew with a word. One by one he opened the cairns of these peoples and one by one he ani-

mated the corpses within, in a manner adapted from how he had animated Khemri's stone ushabti though, at first, his success was minimal. The human remains were far weaker than the enchanted stone of the ushabti and finding the perfect balance of Dhar to animate them and give them a rudiment of purpose was difficult. The first would stumble just a few steps before collapsing in on themselves, consumed by the power that motivated them. As Nagash's control grew, so did the span of animation for these corpses and skeletons, until the time came when Nagash could animate them indefinitely with barely a thought.

Already dead, there was little warpstone dust could do to harm these animated corpses, so Nagash set them to work excavating the caves below Cripple Peak and constructing a stone tower, the foundation of which would later become Nagashizzar, sometimes called the Cursed Pit, perhaps the greatest fortress ever erected.



Requiring more servants to fulfil his plans, Nagash set hundreds of the dead he had animated to capturing and enslaving the degenerate tribes that dwelt upon the shores of the Sour Sea and bathed in its foulness. These sallow-faced mortals were dragged kicking and screaming to Nagash's altar to have their hearts ripped out before their soulless husks would rise into eternal servitude of their new and eternal master.

Unable to resist his magics, the tribesmen took to worshipping the Great Necromancer as a god, sending their least afflicted maidens and youths to Nagash's tower as offerings. Perhaps this worship appealed to Nagash's vanity, for he chose to spare many of the tribes, civilising them in a manner most suitable to his needs and creating a unified nation existing solely to obey his every whim.

Within two centuries, Nagash was absolute lord of a powerful kingdom that stretched along the shores of the Sour Sea, a kingdom where well-armoured Nagashi [those mortal



men and women who worshipped Nagash as their manifest god], served alongside the animated remains of their dead kin and ancestors. The mines below Nagash's tower had been expanded into a mighty network stretching down to the mountain's roots. The fortifications around the tower grew like a cancer in the body of a dying man till they stretched to nearly a league on either side. Thus was made the fortress city of Nagashizzar, an unbreachable keep, laboratory of alchemy, library of the sorcerous arts and a shrine to the pursuit of earthly immortality and the emasculation of all gods and daemons, for they sought to control and consume mortal souls.

Nagashizzar became the capital of what was perhaps the most blindly obedient human nation this world has ever seen. At the centre of this civilisation, like a spider at the centre of its web, Nagash studied and experimented, aware in his own way of everything that his thousands of undead servants perceived, making him



almost omniscient in his own domain. Even within his impregnable fastness, ignored by most of the world, Nagash was not without enemies.

Drawn like moths to a flame by the warpstone, rat-like beastmen, named skaven by the Imperial scholars of yesteryear, came to Cripple Peak. The ratmen's entire civilisation was based upon warpstone, and their leaders, a council of thirteen sorcerers, warlords and priests, demanded that their servants take possession of it wherever it was found. They burst into the mines below Cripple Peak and tried to take the fortress in the same way as they had taken many of the mighty Karaks of the Dawi not long before. Nagashizzar, however, was an altogether more difficult proposition.

Above and below Nagash's kingdom, the skaven marched to war, besieging Nagashizzar

with their strange and terrible devices of war. They were met by the Great Necromancer's armies and his nearly perfected art of necromancy. They faced untiring legions of animated corpses and skeletons, and human fanatics who feared their dark and manifest god more than they feared death.

For decades savage skirmishes were fought in the dark below the citadel. Though outnumbered many times by the skaven, Nagash could not be beaten and so the war ended in a bloody stalemate. Nagash had other plans and the skaven were a distraction from what he saw as his prime concerns, so he made a pact with the Council of Thirteen. In return for their aid in gathering thousands of slaves, Nagash would supply the Council with warpstone mined from Cripple Peak. It was not what the ratmen truly wanted but it was better than





continuing a fruitless war for uncertain reward and so they agreed.

With such heavy and tireless mining, the land and the air across the lands around Nagashizzar became so saturated with the dust of mined warpstone that almost everything began to sicken and die. It seeped through the ground into the root systems of the blighted flora, and from the plants it was transferred to the bodies of the animals that fed upon them. In time, it accumulated within the bodies of those humans who fed upon the contaminated foodstuff and who drank the ever more tainted waters of the mountain springs and deep wells.

Though Nagash states in his writings that he was not overly concerned with the trials of his vassals, he does describe how the Nagashi as an entire people began to sicken and waste. Mutation became ever more commonplace, as did manifestations of all manner of spirits and daemons in the magic saturated air. Although he was immune to the predations of daemons and the terrors of the disembodied spirits, Nagash saw that his mortal servants were not. Something needed to be done if he was to prevent his vassal civilisation from dispersing altogether or worse,

succumbing to the temptations of the daemon-gods.

So it was that Nagash conceived of a plan to remove the weakness of identity and ego from his mortal slaves. Starting with the worst afflicted towns, it pleased Nagash to bid his vassals to eat alive the old and decrepit from amongst their communities, as well as the recently dead while their bodies were still warm, as a form of ritual worship of their lord. Although the combination of raw warpstone and still living blood led to an increasing degeneracy in the minds of and bodies of those that partook of these dark feasts, such was the unholy magic of their feasts that these cannibals no longer died from exposure to the wasting dust of warpstone, even while all life around them did. Soon their individuality faded and their tolerance to fearful and unnatural things increased a thousand-fold.

Within years the entire region around Nagashizzar became little more than a glittering and haunted desert, whose sole living population were roving clans of degenerate and barely-human cannibals. The Great Necromancer did not care. Living or dead, degenerate or otherwise, the mortals of the land had only to serve him, one way or another.





DISCARD YOUR FOOLISH ideas of the 'afterlife'. There is no salvation for your soul to be found outside of this mortal realm. Upon death your soul will either be consumed by a daemon or god, or it will disperse into senseless oblivion within the Chaos Realm. Morr's realm is a fiction.

Spirits that have not been drawn into the Aethyr to be consumed by the Powers that dwell therein remain upon this plane, existing at the same time and in the same space as the mortal world, only in a completely intangible way.

So those things that men have called 'ghosts' are in fact the souls and spirit fragments of dead mortals. Due no doubt to curses, spells, proximity to powerful majiks, entrapment by warpstone or an incredibly strong will [as with Nagash], they have not been drawn from the mortal world yet and instead exist as transparent, immaterial and 'ghostly'.

Of course the presence of these largely intangible and pathetic entities upon the mortal plane is made possible only by the existence

of the winds of magic, in a manner similar to the daemons of Chaos — although it takes less power for a mortal soul to remain upon this plane than it would take for a daemon to manifest itself.

When the winds of magic blow strongly across the world the more coherent spirits trapped upon the mortal plane are sometimes manifested as ghosts, wraiths, poltergeists and all the other malign creatures of folklore.

Those with the eyes to see this spirit realm that exists as an invisible part of the mortal realm, are witness to a land populated by the spirits of deceased mortals and the aethyric echoes of other dead things like animals and sometimes even plants, albeit rarely. Again, this is not a separate realm from the mortal world, it is just another way of seeing and experiencing the mortal world. Gods and daemons can influence both these aspects of the material mortal world but they can affect the immaterial aspect of the mortal world even more easily, because its existence is dependant upon magic leaking across the world.

So indeed, the spirit realm of which necromancers and various visionaries sometimes speak is in fact just the mortal world, but through the 'spirit-sight'. Only those born with the spirit-sight can see the movements of magic around the world, and only they with the spirit-sight are able to interact with the spirit aspect of reality. Even so, such is the forlorn horror of this realm within a realm that it can drive some of the lesser minded of such gifted people mad.

For most mortals, however, the spirit plane is entirely imperceptible, yet the same is largely true for the denizens of the spirit realm as well. The general lack of perception between the material and immaterial upon the mortal plane applies as much to the dead as to the living. Just as the vast majority of living mortals never see, feel or perceive in any way the many



spirits, soul fragments and aethyric echoes around them, so too do the spirits, soul fragments and aethyric echoes not see, feel or perceive the mortal world around them.

But there are exceptions, on both sides of the divide. Some living mortals can perceive in different ways the spirit reality around them, especially necromancers, the brethren of Shyish, vampires, liche priests and indeed some of the more powerful and least-dispersed spirits can perceive the mortal reality around them. Like Nagash himself, we vampires can see both the spirit aspect of the mortal world as well as the material aspect of the mortal world with equal ease. Of all vampires, it is the insane progeny of W'Soran who, I believe, begin to see the mortal aspect of the world less and less clearly until it becomes little more than a hazy shadow. Yet they see the spirit aspect of the mortal world more and more clearly. It is possible that some of the oldest and most insane of W'Soran's bloodline may reach the point where they do not see mortal

things at all but instead see only the winds of magic, spirits, auras and so on.

This would mean that they would still be able to see everything a mortal might but in a very different way. The Necrarch are more likely to see the spirit selves of every living thing rather than the physical self and they would see the aethyric echo of things like castles rather than the physical, 'mortal' aspect. It is sometimes said that the Necrarch walks in the spirit world, interacting with the physical things of the mortal world but perceiving these interactions very differently.

It seems likely to me that when Nagash writes in his work that he died while wandering the desert and strayed into the spirit world, his soul may have actually left his dead body without him even realising, wandering around the dead landscape of the spirit aspect of the mortal world, only to find its way back and possess its body once more — neither truly dead nor alive.



THE ANCIENT NEHEKHARANS had a more complex and sophisticated view of what the soul is from the contemporary scholars and clerics of the Empire. Whereas Sigmar's priesthood may speak of the anima and animus, the identity and energy of the soul, the Nehekharans did

not believe in so simple a spiritual dyad as this. The verbose codices of the *Magistorum Chaotica* describe the soul as a triad; Qeyos, being spirit energy or raw magic; Feyos, the unconscious and non sentient inner being; Deyos, being kind of spirit consciousness, immaterial and yet an intermediary between the inner realms of the mind and the outer realms of the physical world.

For their part the liche priests wrote that every intelligent and self-aware mortal being is composed of seven separate though related elements, being:

Kha — The physical or mortal shell. The body. Corpse.

Ka — Ego, reason and abstract thought.

Ba — The subconscious self and emotion.

Ab — The conscience or the awareness of what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'. Ab was also thought to be the freedom of choice and the ability to choose between right and wrong.

Sekhem — Life-force itself; power; soul-fire or aethyric energy.

Ren — One's True Name; the name specific to every individual being. Ren could perhaps be described as the 'notion' or 'idea' of a particular individual. The signifier of 'self' and individuality. In a sense the Ren of an individ-

ual is not generated purely from the individual itself but from the universe's experience and perception of that individual. It is a difficult concept but suffice to say the Nehekharans believed that to destroy the Ren of a being was to destroy that beings memory after death and thereby undo all that the individual did in his or her life.

Khaibit — The Shadow. The Nehekharans believed that the shadow was the natural result of physical existence and was proof of mortality. So anything with a shadow could be destroyed or at the very least altered by time and its passage.

So THE SOUL, as defined by the liche priests of Nehekhar, was called the *Akhu* and it was the immortal, incorporeal person that was a blend of the Ka, Ab, Ba, Ren and Sekhem bound together and unified for all eternity in an afterlife. Since the time of Settra, the priests of the what became the Mortuary Cult knew that the Akhu that did not necessarily stay whole and safe in after death, as many were the gods and daemons that would seek to consume elements of it, or even the entirety of it.

So it was that the liche priests bent all their efforts into finding a way to bind the Akhu to the mortal shell, or Kha, so that it would not disperse or be consumed after death. The problem that they conceived with this was that the mortal shell of all once-living creatures eventually decays and though preserving spells and alchemical compounds could be applied to a corpse to slow its decay, nothing could truly stop the march of time entirely. This was unsatisfactory in that the liche priests had for centuries promised the kings of Nehekhar that they would awaken after death into an incorruptible body, with their souls and minds intact.





As I have mentioned previously, the priests of the Mortuary Cult had knowledge enough to bind Settra's soul to his body after death but at that time they did not have the knowledge or skill to allow Settra's soul to animate its body, nor to prevent the body from decaying. In time the liche priests discovered a means of binding their own souls to their own corporeal bodies while maintaining mortal consciousness and the ability to animate their bodies.

From bound daemons, or djinn, the liche priests found that entities from the realms beyond death, like the daemons themselves, often took on corporeal forms when they manifested upon the mortal plane. These bodies could house the entirety of the akhu, despite the fact that no daemon was born upon the mortal plane and so did not possess a true mortal shell, or Kha.

The liche priests came to refer to this corporeal body of daemons as the *Sabu* — the opposite of the Kha. They saw it as the incorruptible and divine house of the most active and powerful Akhu, which manifested only when such Akhu were summoned to the mortal plane. Yet the Sahu, so the liche priests understood, was ultimately bound the Aethyr and could not maintain itself upon the mortal plane for long periods of time without considerable sorcerous effort.

Yet even this was not enough. They knew that even though they themselves were now beyond natural death, their bodies were cracked and withered, like the dried corpses of mummies, and they knew also that they could still be destroyed by other means.

Their goal, and Nagash's desire that drove him to become what he did, was to find a way of creating an incorruptible and eternal Sahu that would be able to remain upon the mortal plane forever. Yet no liche priest ever achieved this until Nagash. Through the might of his willpower, his virtuosity at sculpting magic and his consumption of huge amounts of warpstone, Nagash managed to create for himself a lasting physical shell. Even if this body were destroyed it would gradually reform once more without ever surrendering his soul to the Aethyr. Nagash cared nothing for how this physical shell looked just so long as it served his purposes.



THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES of his banishment from Nehekhar, Nagash had not forgotten his promise to the kings of his former land and he would have his revenge upon them whether it took centuries or millennia. Yet it was from amongst the descendents of his former enemies that Nagash found his greatest and most powerful servants.

From my own travels across Nehekhar and due in no small part to my lengthy sojourn within the ruins of Lahmia, studying the hieroglyphs of its grand temple, its many monuments and palaces, I have gleaned much of the early history of my kind. It seems that while Nagash had ruled in Khemri, Lahmia was but a distant provincial city-state of the Nekharan empire. It was a land which suffered greatly under the tyrannical rule of Nagash and here began the rebellion that would overthrow Nagash. Under the leadership of King Lahmizzar of Lahmia, all the other subject kingdoms of Nehekhar, and eventually even large sections of Khemri's own population, rose up in rebellion against Nagash and his grand vizier, Arkhan. After the death of Lahmizzar and several years into the war against King Lahmizzash, Nagash finally succeeded in blending the sorceries taught to him by his Druchii captives and altered versions of the ritual enchantments of the Mortuary Cult to bring forth his wrath against his enemies a new and terrible fashion.

Though the ushabti of Khemri's many temples had been awoken to fight for their city on numerous occasions since Lahmia first brought war against Khemri, Nagash found a way to channel the darkest magic into the rituals used to awaken the ushabti. The Great Necromancer saturated the once-sacred statues with black magic to make them more powerful, destructive and terrible of visage

than ever before, making them behave and appear more like daemons than minor avatars of Nehekhar's ancient gods.

This proved to be too much for many of the peoples and soldiers of Khemri, who rose up against Nagash from within Khemri, even as the armies of Lahmia and the other city-states marched on Khemri from without. The last battle between the united peoples of Nehekhar and Nagash, Arkhan, the other liche priests acolytes and the corrupted ushabti was fought around the Black Pyramid. Though Nagash had somehow managed to use his powers to escape, his pyramid was desecrated, his acolytes put to death and their carcasses burnt.

The purge of Khemri was not complete. While Lahmizzash was negotiating the end of his war-alliance with the kings of Zandri, Numas, Mahrak, Lybaras and Rasetra, and was establishing himself as king of Khemri and Emperor of all Nehekhar, scrolls containing many of Nagash's greatest discoveries were being saved from destruction.

For Nagash had long planned against such a day as that one of his defeat. Nearly a decade before Lahmizzar had brought war to Khemri, Nagash had feigned to drive priests from the Mortuary Cult out of Khemri. They, he claimed, were disloyal to him and they were seen to barely escape his wrath with their lives as they fled far away to the coast and Lahmia. In truth these priests were spies sent by Nagash who already had got wind of the discontent growing in Lahmia to his rule of Nehekhar.

In time, W'Soran, the eldest and wisest of those liche priests who had supposedly rebelled against Nagash, had managed to ingratiate himself upon the royal court of Lahmia. He would become a trusted advisor of Lahmizzar, and later Lahmizzash, and also



tutored Lahmizzash's only daughter, Neferatem [whose name meant Beautiful Sun] heir to Lahmia's throne. In this way the eventual fate of Lahmia and its royal court was sealed, for after Arkhan, W'Soran was the foremost of Nagash's acolytes from amongst the Mortuary Cult of Khemri.

Under W'Soran's influence, Neferatem was raised with an insatiable curiosity for all things arcane. Her curiosity was a secret one, for women not of the priesthood were forbidden to explore the secret mysteries of this world and the next. So it was that as her father held council with the other kings of Nehekhara, Neferatem was all too easily persuaded by W'Soran to order some of Nagash's scrolls to be snatched from the purifying flames. They were placed in a quartz chest and transported back to Lahmia along with thousands of other artefacts, inscriptions and statues as the spoils of war.

At the conclusion of the council of Nehekhara's kings, it was agreed that Lahmizzash would remain in Khemri as king of that great city

and Emperor of Nehekhara. His daughter, now twenty four years of age, would return with her trusted advisors to Lahmia and rule there as queen. Though advancing in years, Lahmizzash took himself another wife from one of the few remaining noble houses of Khemri that Nagash had not purged and begat a son and heir for the throne of Khemri.



IMMEDIATELY UPON HER return to Lahmia, Neferatem went about studying the Nagashi scrolls and artefacts she had ordered brought back with her from Khemri. Although Neferatem began deciphering Nagash's works with the otherwise noble intent of one whom simply wished to learn, in time her determination grew. Such was her resentment of the priesthood of the Mortuary Cult that forbade any outside of their number could ever study arcane lore, she determined to study those mysteries that even the great priests of Nehekbara feared — the mysteries of the Great Heretic himself, Nagash.

Only W'Soran seemed sympathetic to this injustice, as indeed he had been from Neferatem's earliest years. He would speak privately with Neferatem, saying that he knew as truth that the only reason the priests of the Mortuary Cult forbade anyone from outside their order from studying their dark arts was simply because they wished to amass power for themselves at the expense of all others. Though priests might claim that Nagash's works were evil, W'Soran counselled Neferatem that no arcane art was evil in itself, except if one used it for evil ends. So it was that Neferatem kept the existence of Nagashi artefacts and her study of them secret from her court.

Neferatem became fascinated by Nagash's early experiments, seeing the value in his desire to find a way to defeat not only death but also the ravages of time. Before long, Neferatem began to emulate some of Nagash's simpler experiments but it did not take long for her innocent fascination to become an outright obsession with Nagash and his quest for immortality. This state of affairs was doubtlessly exacerbated by W'Soran's encouragement of Neferatem and indeed the addictive energies that so saturated Nagash's works.

Within three years W'Soran brought his plans for Neferatem to fruition. He secretly made it known to those priests of the Mortuary Cult who were not loyal to him that the queen had rescued Nagash's heretical works and sought to reproduce them. Without proof of such, the liche priests did not wish to move against the queen openly for fear of being accused of treason, nor could they allow Nagash's blasphemous work to be recreated, with all the attendant horrors that this implied. So the liche priests began to move against Neferatem in more subtle ways, undermining her power at court and creating distrust and resentment against her amongst Lahmia's populace.

Within another year, again with W'Soran encouraging and advising her, Neferatem decided her hand been forced. She could not risk revealing to her guards that she had indeed been seeking to emulate Nagash's accursed works, nor could she stand alone against the liche priests. So it was that she invoked the darker aspects of Nagash's works — those that she had avoided until that point. In the dark of night Neferatem and W'Soran used the skills they had gleaned from Nagash's work to eradicate the most powerful of those liche priests who were moving against the queen. In panic, the remaining liche priests used their power to awaken the ushabti of their temples and send them against the palace, playing directly into W'Soran's hands. Having already gathered together those liche priests loyal to him, W'Soran raised the alarm, telling the palace guards that a renegade faction within the Mortuary Cult was attempting to overthrow their queen by using cursed magics to corrupt the ushabti.

The guards fought bravely to defend their beloved queen, but the ushabti were too powerful. It was then, just as the captain of the





palace guards was leading the last of his men in an attempt to reach the queen's chambers before the ushabti, that Neferatem emerged in all her glory. She stepped from her chambers with W'Soran at her side, throwing bolts of crackling darkness at the ushabti and destroyed them utterly. Once the battle was ended, Neferatem ordered that the remaining guards mobilise a contingent from the city's infantry and go with W'Soran to round up and execute all those priests who were responsible for the outrageous attack. Naturally, W'Soran assured that priests from more than just the Mortuary Cult were slain

in this purge, thereby securing the power of his own acolytes within the city.

Within five years a new cult had taken root in Lahmia, one tightly bound to the remaining priests of the Mortuary Cult. The founder of this cult was none other than Queen Neferatem herself. So obsessed was Neferatem by Nagash and so intoxicated by the raw power of his sorcery, she had begun to view the Great Necromancer as a manifest god, entirely misunderstood by the petty kings of Nehekhar, of whom she had grown to regard her father in distant Khemri as worst. The inception of a cult to worship Nagash was not the most profound change wrought within Lahmia. Neferatem had gone ever further in her experimentations with Nagash's work and with W'Soran's aid had recreated all of Nagash's macabre experiments and dark rituals, including the Elixir of Immortality.

W'soran had made subtle changes to the elixir, making it even more wondrous than Nagash's original, for this new elixir granted all who supped of it true immortality — a total immunity to death — and also took the entirety of the drinker's soul far beyond the reach of all gods and daemons in a way that Nagash himself only achieved having consumed prodigious amounts of raw warpstone.

When she had first supped from the elixir she and W'soran had recreated, her body had been wracked with agony for a short while after but when the pain subsided she rose from her bed feeling and looking healthier than she ever had done. She was also stronger, faster and could think with greater speed and depth than ever before.

Everything about her had been improved and she felt like a goddess but in time, she learnt the terrible price of her new power. The elixir did not just enhance her abilities and bestow immortality, it forced her to become a predator of human blood. A vampire.



THERE ARE THOSE amongst the foolish priesthods of the Old World who believe that to become a vampire is to first die and lose one's soul. There are others who believe that vampires are nothing more than mortals who have become possessed by some kind of malevolent spirit or some other creature of the Chaos Realm. I will tell you now my reader that none of these frightened and petty postulations are true. We are more alive and more truly creatures of the mortal world than any other.

Although W'soran was indeed a great and powerful sorcerer in his own right, I believe that it is likely that his master somehow managed to keep in contact with him throughout the years of his banishment. I believe it was Nagash, after he had reached the Sour Sea and had begun to consume raw warpstone and contemplate more deeply upon the nature of immortality, who guided W'soran and Neferatem. The queen and her ancient priestly advisor not only found the secret of eternal youth, they also managed to cut themselves off entirely from the Chaos Realm, drawing whatever aspects of the soul and spirit that resided within the Aethyr completely into themselves. So locked within the very fibre of Neferatem's body was her entire identity and a small vortex of aethyric, or spirit, energy.

Not only did this mean that Neferatem and W'soran could never truly die but it also meant that their souls would be forever beyond the grasp of daemons and gods, for their souls were inextricably bound to the particles of their mortal bodies and entirely cut off from the Aethyr. They had become the first vampires.

This state of affairs granted these first of all vampires great power, for their control over their bodies was absolute and the strength of mind, will and purpose garnered them by having

the entirety of their souls, their akhu, bound within their bodies was truly immense. Essentially, they had married their hha with the divine sahu into one immortal body, although from that day until this, no vampire has a shadow, or khaibit, without making a conscience effort to cast one.



Whereas the souls of other mortals exist equally within the Aethyr as much as they do within the fabric of the mortal's physical body, the soul of a vampire does not. Every single element of a vampire's soul and spirit is removed from the Aethyr and cut off from it, so whereas the souls of other mortals are kept dynamic in part by their connection to the Aethyr, this is not the case for vampires. Though our bodies are powerful and full of vitality, the Aethyr is sealed off from us and our souls grow so cold, heavy and tired in time, in a way that no other mortal could understand and in a way that cannot be alleviated without very specific and conscious intervention.



In the absence of warpstone and the desire to consume it, the first of our kind, Neferatem and W'soran, were sculpted by their desires and perhaps by Nagash's will, to find another means to revitalise their souls that would not require exposure to that stuff of Chaos.

Thus vampires are left with only two options of revitalising their souls or else sink into painful and endless torpor; draw unto themselves the winds of magic as they blow across the mortal world or take for themselves the Sekhem bound within other living beings.



The vortices of aethyric energy, or Sekhem, within Neferatem, W'soran and indeed all vampires slowly drain aethyric energy out from the environment immediately around them. As the souls of vampires are so hungry for Sekhem, they do not care how much or in what way it is drawn into them. As part of this process, all Sekhem, or indeed magic, that is drawn into the bodies and souls of vampires is absorbed swiftly and greedily, compressing it

into the darkest of magic. So indeed, left to themselves, vampires will quite unconsciously draw all available magic from the vicinity they resides within, turning this magic into corrosive Dhar as it does so.

The dangers of this are telling indeed, for if the vampire relies on this form of revitalisation for his or her soul, not only is it dependent on there being a steady supply of magic in their environment but also, and perhaps more importantly, the more Dhar that saturates a soul the harsher the effects it has. W'soran embraced this state of affairs, as indeed have all his progeny, and as a result he and his Necrarchs do not need to feed very often, if at all but they have paid a bitter price for this cessation of blood thirst. Their minds have suffered from their constant and willing saturation of dark magic, as have their bodies which are hideous and malformed. Neferatem, like most other vampires, embraced another means of acquiring vital sustenance for her soul, to consume the still living blood of other mortals. In this way we vampires can revitalise our souls in a pure manner that does not require us to allow copious amounts of dark magic to saturate our inner beings, exposing ourselves to all the attendant dangers.

The wracking pain and utter misery of a vampire not feeding when the hunger is upon him is terrible indeed — worse by far than any mortal's cravings for food or water. We must feed to drive back the creeping chill of our wasting souls and to lift the weight within our hearts and minds, lest we slow and collapse, or until we begin to willingly draw into our deepest selves the blackest magic and gradually lose our beauty and our sanity.

This is a price we pay willingly, for the physical and mental power we possess and for immortality free from the concerns of gods and daemons are treasures beyond all measure.





AFTER A FURTHER seventeen years of reigning in Khemri, Lahmizzash died and his young son, Lahkashar took the throne. Lahkashar ruled for twenty-one years before proving his mortality at the age of thirty eight, leaving the throne of Khemri to his own son Lahkashaz, who ruled for nigh-on forty years. Throughout the reign of Lahmizzash and his line the great necropoleis were abandoned and the bodies of Lahmizzash and his two descendants were taken back for burial in the rock tombs of Lahmia.

All was not well in Nehekhara, however. By the time Lahkashaz had ruled Khemri and Nehekhara for twenty years, Neferatem was known to still rule in Lahmia. Most bizzarely for the other nobles of Nehekhara, despite the fact that Neferatem should have been well into her eighth decade, she was reputed to not look a day older than when she had assumed the throne of Lahmia so many years before. Indeed her beauty was already legendary across the length and breadth of the desert lands.

A new temple had been built in Lahmia, using stones and statues ransacked from

Khemri at the time of Nagash's defeat. This temple was the focal point of the new cult founded by Queen Neferatem and her chief priest, W'soran, and was favoured to the exclusion of all older cults devoted to the traditional gods of Nehekhara. It was the nature and practices of this cult that were to prove the downfall of Lahmia and the rule of Lahmizzash's line in Khemri, despite the fact that Lahmizzash and his offspring were far removed from the affairs of distant Lahmia.

Dark rumours began to circulate about the rulers of Lahmia a few years after Neferatem came to the throne. After an apparent attempt to overthrow the queen, the Mortuary Cult, along with many of the other cults of Lahmia, were purged by the liche priest W'soran and his own loyal following. A short while after this, Neferatem's rule became ever more strict, brooking no criticism or insurrection. She founded a reformed Mortuary Cult, with W'soran as the cult's high priest. Unusually, this new cult allowed more women to join its ranks to start with than it did men — the males initiates being limited solely to W'soran and his own acolytes.



No one really knew just what the worship of this new cult entailed but fears grew after Neferatem's fair cousin, Khalida Neferher of Lybaras, refused to join the cult only for Neferatem to accuse her of plotting to take Lahmia's throne for herself. Neferatem slew her cousin in a duel in front of the entire Lahmian court.

As the decades passed, visiting dignitaries to Lahmia were filled with horror to see that the statues within Lahmia's great temples and the

stories etched upon its walls in richly coloured hieroglyphs, were all of Nagash. In fact, many of these statues were the ones that had originally adorned his own palace and temples in Khemri; images that were thought to have been destroyed during the sacking of the city by Lahmizzash's armies. These dignitaries and envoys from the other city-states of Nehekhara would return to their own lands with tales of the obvious corruption of Lahmia's aristocracy.





cult, was such that any king of Nehekhara should have been eager to ask for her hand in marriage. Instead, all these princesses were shunned, rumoured to possess powers of sorcery which could bend any man to their will.

The truth, of course, was that Neferatem had become the first true vampire — both powerful and immortal — and that she had begun to bestow the gift of immortality upon others. Encouraged by the ever-scheming W'soran, Neferatem came to realise that in time the other nobles of Lahmia would begin to question their unchanging beauty and incredible vigour. Neferatem realised that with only W'soran as her ally she was vulnerable and so, one by one, allowed others to join her and W'soran.

Abhorash, the brave captain of the guards who had fought so hard to defend her from the ushabti was the first, followed by those people at court who were closest to her, including Harakhthe, the cultured court vizier, and Maatmeses, the chief judge of Lahmia and lord of the city watch. Ushoran, Neferatem's long ignored little brother, eventually learnt of the elixir, and without his sister's consent crept into the temple and drank of it. Despite her fury at his action, Neferatem had allowed him to live because he had become one of the trueborn vampires and they had agreed amongst themselves that it would be forbidden for them to kill another of their kind.

For many years the queen and her vampire court sought to keep their altered state secret from the populace, limiting their predations



to criminals in Lahmia's prisons, and certain slaves, servants and others who would not be missed. However, as the years passed the people of Lahmia rose up against their masters, goaded and aided by agents of the Nehekharas' other city-states. So it was that Neferatem and the other vampires went about suppressing the all-out insurrection of Lahmia, slaying hundreds of citizens and soldiers, restoring order and then imposing the open worship of Nagash upon the entire populace. From that time onward Neferatem, the Beautiful Sun, became known by the people of Lahmia as Neferata, Beautiful Death.





WHILST WE VAMPIRES have the same physical appearance as humans, we are in fact far removed from humanity and greater than any living mortal. However, with greatness and immortality there come risks, and these risks are indeed the heart of vampirism.

Although the majority of us are graceful and beautiful, all vampires are predators by necessity. It is simply impossible for most vampires to ignore the desire and need to consume living blood, for in the absence of being able to die we face instead the risk of an eternity spent in a torpid state of pain and misery if we do not feed. Even if the one who has become a vampire abhorred blood in his previous life, our unnatural hunger for blood would soon change them.

All vampires should be cautious to keep their hunger in check. Control is all important

if we are to avoid insanity. It is not unheard of for our hunger to become too much for us to control and we risk degenerating into beasts, as indeed the vile Strigoi have become. The craving in our blood and the strength of our bodies means that our rage is terrible to behold. My own sire had little control on his temper and would fly into a murderous rage at the slightest provocation. I remember how his normal visage would suddenly sprout razor-sharp fangs and bestial features. His eyes would gleam with inner light and the mere glance from them could cause even the bravest mortal warrior to flee in panic.

It is inevitable, though I might say no great trial, that over the centuries a vampire will become so soaked in blood that he no longer cares about the death of a mortal. Pity, compassion and mercy for those we must feed upon simply vanishes. After all, to our kind human society is but a blur of change, for while we do



not age, those we live amongst do, and it becomes pointless to try and relate to such short lived creatures as humans. Indeed, just consider the differences between we immortal predators and mere humans. How can we possibly allow ourselves to feel pity or kinship with humanity? Our hunger forces us to violent acts that are considered murderous and even cannibalistic to humans and compared to our victims, our physical and mental superiority is vast. It is little wonder that most of my kind regard all of humanity as mere cattle.

I would say again that this state of affairs puts great pressure upon the character of minds of all vampires, hence the reason madness seems to be the constant companion of many of the bloodlines. Obviously vampirism is not for the weak minded or petty spirited. An unending existence and the constant use of dark magic will inevitably drive the weak willed into morbidity and insanity. Hence the reason we rarely allow anyone to join us in immortality.

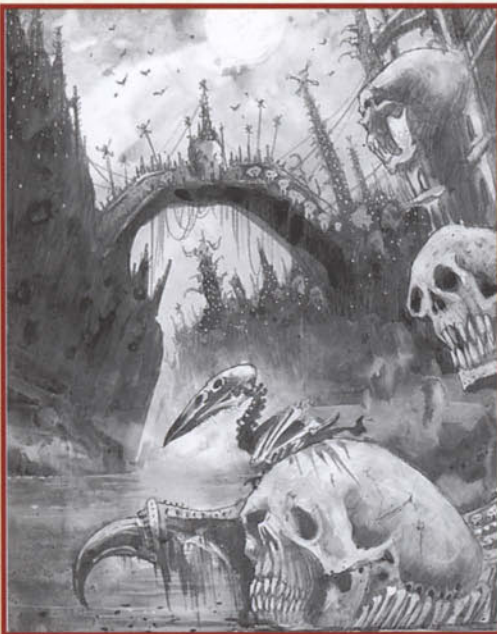
As much as humans fear and hate us, they are also fascinated by us. Many humans, especially those who wish to study the art of

necromancy, seek us out to offer us their services, for we have something that these necromancers crave — we are truly immortal and capable of bestowing this gift upon others. With the probable exception of the monstrous Strigoi, we vampires always choose our get with great care. We either want companions in our long and sometimes lonely existence, or else, as is often the case with the progeny of Abhorash and W'soran, supremely talented and willing students. Thus we choose only the most intelligent, most beautiful and the most powerful to join us in our immortality.

The only way for we vampires to pass on our great gift is through what we call the Blood Kiss. When granting this wondrous boon we pass part of our own blood to our chosen protégé instead of draining the mortal of his or her life's blood. The chosen man or woman will appear to fall into a terrible illness for a while, although the length of this period varies immensely. Eventually the chosen one will arise once more from the sick bed as a powerful immortal. Because elements of their bound souls were passed on in their blood, each of the trueborn vampires of Lahmia passed on certain traits of their personality and physical inclinations, which hold true throughout all their progeny to certain degrees.

Yet as I have mentioned previously, the potency of each new generation of vampire is less than the last, so that the most powerful vampires are always the eldest, or those given their gift by the eldest. The elder vampires can also choose to grant the Blood Kiss to more than one person, while third, fourth and fifth generation vampires may be able to grant only a single Blood Kiss during their long existence.

There is a way for a vampire to grow in power until he or she rivals that of his ultimate sires, and that is through hunting down and

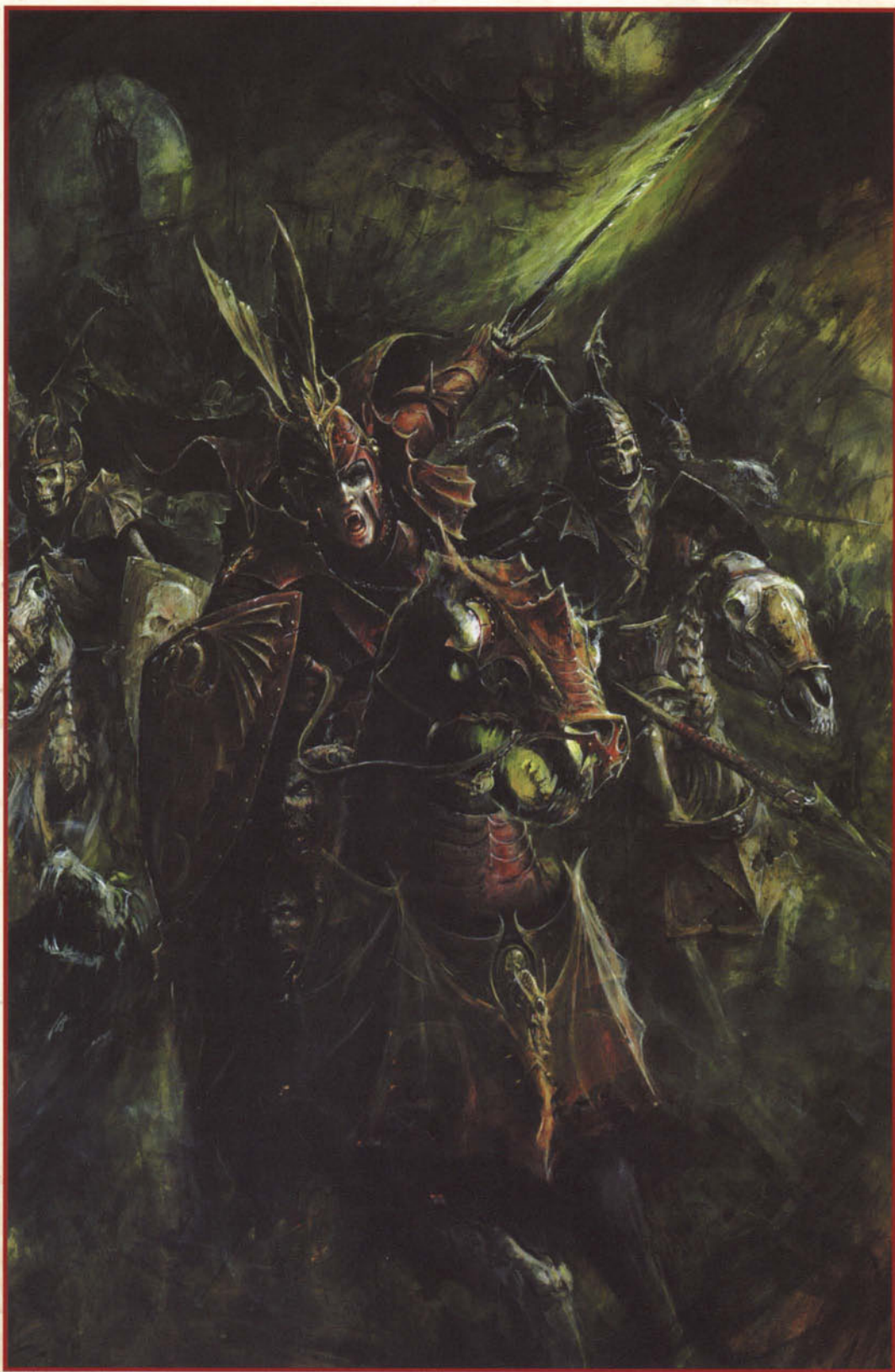




drinking the blood of other vampires. The more powerful the vampire consumed thus, the greater the power passed on to the hunter. Elements of the strength and skill of the vampiric victim are passed onto the conquering hunter, making it an attractive prospect indeed for some of my brethren.

At Middenheim when faced I faced Volkmar, the tainted and cursed one-time Theogonist of Sigmar, I realised with absolute clarity that I would be wise to increase my strength until I eclipse even my late sire. For if a mortal like one of Volkmar's predecessors could defeat one so mighty as my sire, then there is a chance that Volkmar, or some other mortal, may do the same to me. This cannot be allowed to happen. I will not go back to how I was for so many years after my humiliation at Hel Fenn. If I cannot gain wisdom from my defeats then I surely am not worthy of immortality. With this in mind I myself have sought out and supped of all those of my own bloodline and generation, assuring that I am the most powerful remaining vampire of all Vashanesh's line and increasing my power ten-fold. I will not rest. I intend seek out Abhorash's progeny and sisters of Lahmia, for of all the bloodlines other than my own they are the least tainted and I can gain much from them.







O RETURN TO my story, as time passed in Lahmia its vampiric aristocracy discovered more of their powers. Their ability to perceive and grasp the winds of magic had increased dramatically and they could weave mighty spells without fear of mutation or harm befalling them. They had the

strength of a dozen men and no disease, accident nor mortal weapon could cause them lasting harm. Not even the mighty bound djinn of the desert nomads could destroy them, for although these powerful entities could shatter the vampires' bodies, the vampires could always be brought back with the aid of their fellows.

Their bodies were theirs to change as they pleased and when the hunger was upon them, they willed their teeth to grow into needle-pointed fangs so that they might more easily pierce the veins of their victims. The true-born vampires learnt also that they could pass on their gift of eternity through their own blood. Other than Neferata, few of the first vampires wished to sire or conceive children and even Neferata left the rearing of her vampire-born children to others. The lords of Lahmia found that by giving their blood to another mortal they could create lesser

vampires that could be controlled by their sire.

Each new vampire could create more of his or her kind, although each generation had slightly lesser powers and abilities than their sires. In time the temple of Lahmia became the focal point for a whole host of these immortals and they commanded that the people Lahmia worship them alongside Nagash as their manifest deities. With such uncontested power within Lahmia, the vampire aristocracy slid into decadence. They did not care about the growing unrest across Nehekhara at the stories leaving Lahmia, nor did they care that what they did within Lahmia was having a detrimental effect upon the rule of the Lahkashaz, the grandson of Neferata's father, in Khemri.

In due course, the Khemrians and the other kingdoms of Nehekhara revolted against the rule of King Lahkashaz, for how could they accept as their overlord one who was of the same blood as the heretical queen of Lahmia? Supported by the other city-states of Nehekhara, General Setep, a native Khemrian, overthrew Lahkashaz and seized the throne. The Lahmian dynasty was ousted, but the city-state of Lahmia remained independent with Neferata and her court still in power, secure from conquest for the time being beyond the mountains.



UNBEKNOWNST TO ALL, Lahkashaz had sired an heir, albeit one out of wedlock with one of his many concubines. Vashanesh was tall and powerful, possessing all the strength, nobility and fascination with strategy of his great-grandfather, Lahmizzash. Yet Vashanesh was said to also have had a hardness about him and a zealous drive to succeed in his endeavours, perhaps inherited from his great-grandfather's second wife, she who was of Nagash's own bloodline.

Vashanesh escaped Khemri with a small band of men loyal to him. Together they made their way to Lahmia, believing that the



rumours about the city were mere fabrications invented by the jealous kings of Nehekhara. They were wrong, of course. Soon after their caravan train entered the city, tired and dusty after any weeks of travel, he was arrested by the pale guards of the city watch. Saying that he

was related to the ruling family and insisting on being taken to present himself at court to deliver an important message, Vashanesh was taken before Neferata. There he told the queen all that had happened in Khemri and warned that the kings of Nehekhara had turned their eyes in hatred towards Lahmia and all its children. As Vashanesh had been a commander in General Setep's army, he knew much of the plans the general had for Lahmia.

Not quite realising the nature of the beings he faced and perhaps too arrogant to fear them even if he did, Vashanesh was entirely unafraid when Ushoran stepped forward to mock him, saying that the rulers of Lahmia were beyond the might of any to conquer and had no reason to fear anyone. To Ushoran's shock and fury, Vashanesh did not offer him a second glance, instead striding up to the foot of Neferata's throne, stopping only when her personal champion, Abhorash, drew his sword and pressed its point to Vashanesh's throat. Again, Vashanesh paid this interruption no mind, gazing directly at the pale beauty of the queen.

For her part, Neferata was greatly impressed with this confident, dark-eyed man, and saw the strength and pride of her father within him. She bade Abhorash lower his sword and dismissed him and the entire court from her presence so that she might speak with Vashanesh alone. Only W'soran remained behind, confident in his role as chief advisor to the queen but even as Vashanesh turned questioning eyes upon him, Neferata dismissed the ancient priest. It is said that W'soran lingered there for a moment, recognising that for the first time in nearly century his control over Neferata had been cast into doubt. Then he left, leaving the queen and the proud mortal behind him.

Once alone, Vashanesh told the queen all he had learned and all he suspected of General



Setep's plans, and offered council on how best he believed to counter them. As Neferata mulled over his words, Vashanesh asked about the queen and her court, asking what relation she was to her great-grandfather's daughter, Queen Neferatem, for Neferata's beauty seemed an almost replica to the statues Vashanesh had seen of Neferatem. Neferata merely smiled, replying that she was of the same blood as the Lahmizzash's daughter. Not content with the enigma of the queen's response, Vashanesh continued to question her, criticising the ignorance and decadent arrogance of her court for thinking that they were beyond the wrath of the other kings of Nehekhara. It was perhaps then that Neferata decided upon Vashanesh's fate.

Here was a man of the same noble blood as the queen, and yet also possessing blood of Nagash's own family — however diluted. His intelligence, charisma and insight were plain for all to see, as was his pride, strength, natural command and the fact that he was obviously quite taken with the queen. With this man at her side Neferata perceived that she might be able to bring her own plans to fruition, for the queen was no fool and she had long seen the decadence of her court and how W'soran had used it to gather power enough to rival her own. Though the queen herself had ordered the inception of the Cult of Nagash, she had ever seen the object of their devotion as a great man who whose teachings offered immortality and salvation from the yoke of gods. W'soran, on the other hand, openly worshipped Nagash as a god, caring more for Nagash the being rather than Nagash's teachings, and this, amongst so many other considerations, had begun to concern Neferata. Where she was still too wrapped up in the complex politics of her court, Vashanesh was not, and it seemed unlikely that he would be cowed by anyone.

So Neferata told Vashanesh that he was correct in his judgement of Lahmia's court. They were indeed decadent and ineffectual but she also assured him that with the right hand at the tiller they could be steered to greatness. She proposed an alliance with Vashanesh, a union of the two lines of Lahmizzash. If they were to marry, Vashanesh could rule Lahmia as Neferata's co-monarch and together they could reshape the kingdom into the power it should be. Vashanesh agreed.

Without further ado, Neferata bade Vashanesh follow her to her temple where within it was an altar upon which was a chalice. Perhaps guided by some instinct, Vashanesh grasped the chalice in both hands and swallowed several long draughts of the elixir within it. Whether Vashanesh willingly and knowingly partook of the Elixir of Immortality is not recorded in any history but it is known that after supping of it, he and Neferata also shared their blood with each other, creating permanent a bond between them. Abhorash despised this bond above all else, for he had long been in love with Neferata and had desired to be her consort.

Vashanesh threw himself into his role of King of Lahmia with vigour, showing himself to be a strong and natural ruler. Regardless of the petty factions at court, Vashanesh reorganised how the city-state was run, tasking each of the firstborn vampires with reordering and making efficient a different aspect of city life. Alongside this, Vashanesh and Neferata sent out hundreds of agents to the other city-states of Nehekhara on a mission to disrupt for as long as they could the mobilisation of these states against Lahmia and to encourage conflict between them. The plan of Lahmia's co-monarchs succeeded throughout the rule of three more kings of Khemri after Setep had died. Once King Alcadizaar, known as the Conqueror, ascended to the throne of Khemri, war finally found its way to Lahmia.





BETWEEN ALCADIZAAR and his father and grandfather, all of Nehekara had been subdued under the direct rule of Khemri once more. All, that was, save Lahmia. The hatred and suspicion that the peoples of Nehekara had towards those they saw as the heretics and sorcerers of Lahmia gave Alcadizaar all the popular impetus he needed. Since Setep had taken the throne of Khemri, the Mortuary Cult had been reinstated within that great city's walls. After Nagash's acolytes had been slain, Lahmizzash had chosen not to welcome the cult back into Khemri, believing that it was somehow responsible for creating Nagash, however unintentionally. Now the cult was as implicit to life in Khemri as it ever had been and Alcadizaar consulted with its priests with regards to Lahmia. They advised him that the cult in Lahmia was dangerous; that is sought to summon forth Nagash from wherever it was he had vanished to plague Nehekara

once again. Though not entirely correct in their assumption about Lahmia, the liche priests of Khemri were not entirely wrong either.

Declaring a holy war against Lahmia in the name of the traditional gods of Nehekara, Alcadizaar raised a mighty army from all his dominions. All the kings of Nehekara followed him and the glittering legions advanced over the mountains. They did not find Lahmia unprepared.

Having placed Abhorash and his disciplined and keenly military mind in charge of all Lahmia's armies over a century before the invasion, Vashanesh had assured that the city had a credible force with which to drive back any single army. Unfortunately for fair Lahmia, they did not face a single army but many. The Nehekaran armies of Khemri, Zandri, Numas, Quatar, Mahrak, Rasetra and Lybaras were joined by the armies of Bel-Alliad, Bhagar and Ka-Sabar of the burgeoning Arabian civilisation conquered by Alcadizaar.





Abhorash led the defence of the city and none could stand against the immortal warrior. In his mortal life he had been Lahmia's most lauded warrior and in his immortal life he was nigh unstoppable. The dusty plains before Lahmia's gates became muddy with the blood of his foes, their bodies heaped at the bottom in a great mound of death, even as Lahmia's armies were gradually driven back. In his absolute fury, Abhorash fed on his enemies with savage abandon, and his strength grew even more.

None had studied Nagash's works as deeply as W'soran and none was more devoted to the obeying will of the Great Necromancer. With but a word from the pale slit of his mouth, W'soran caused the slain to rise once more, binding the recently dead to his will and casting them against their still-living comrades. At this time, necromancy was a new art known only to its creator, Nagash, and so it became clear to Neferata and Vashanesh that the vampiric liche priest had indeed kept in some kind of contact with his great lord across the seas of time. Legends say that all the way from

Nagashizzar, Nagash turned his gaze upon the defence of Lahmia and used his vast magical powers to aid those whose cult idolised him. The Khemrians and their allies brought forth machineries of war and, though battered by rocks, burned by alchemical fire and showered transfixing with arrows and bolts, Lahmia stood defiant. The many priests of Nehekhar that were arrayed against Lahmia invoked their gods and the magicians of Araby released the fury of bound djinn to curse the defenders of Lahmia, and yet still the vampires fought on, though their mortal servants were slain in their thousands.

For a full week, Abhorash and Vashanesh led their army against the bronze-clad armies of their enemies but for all their immense ferocity and skill, and despite the deaths of thousands of their foes, they were unable to stop Alcadizaar from sacking their city. The army of Lahmia was vanquished and the few mortal survivors of the city turned against their overlords in the last days of the battle. Within the city's walls desperate mobs had begun to smash the palaces and monuments of Lahmia. The great temple was put to the torch and those petty and decadent vampires who had chosen to hide within it rather than fight were reduced to ash by the raging flames and then scattered on the warm breeze across the desert, never to be revived again. Many of the vampiric princes and princesses of Lahmia met their end in this way. Many more who managed to flee were hunted down and killed by the vengeful Nehekharans and their priests. Only the very strongest vampires escaped, amongst them the trueborn of their kind: Neferata, Vashanesh, Abhorash, Ushoran, W'soran, Harakhte and Maatmeses.

Perhaps drawn to the Lord of Undeath by some instinct, these seven great masters of all vampires fled northward and one by one arrived in Nagashizzar.



HAVING WATCHED THE fate of Lahmia from the moment W'soran had arrived there until its destruction, Nagash had planned for this day. He welcomed the vampires, regarding them as worthy champions for his armies, their immortality a tribute to his genius. The Great Necromancer had become mighty indeed, and though the vampires of Lahmia were immensely powerful, they were no match for him and they knew it. Nagash said that if they obeyed him he would make them greater than ever they were before.

As proof of this promise Nagash burned from the gathered vampires all ability to experience fear and regret; a mixed blessing indeed, though not one any of the vampires had a choice in. In Vashanesh, Nagash recognised a born leader and seeing that the other vampires would never follow his chosen acolyte, W'soran, and much to the growing bitterness of the increasingly ignored Neferata, Nagash presented a ring to Vashanesh. Made from some magical alloy, the ring was set with a stone of refined and enchanted warpstone. With this ring, Vashanesh would be able to command all the other vampires and they would be impelled to obey. The only caveat upon this was that should Vashanesh ever disobey Nagash, the spell would be broken and he and all vampires would be cursed for all eternity. As an added incentive for Vashanesh, Nagash told him that the prime enchantment of the ring was to make its wearer indestructible; even were his body to be destroyed, he would not have to wait for allies to resurrect him as other vampires would. Vashanesh could not refuse such a gift as that.

So, with Vashanesh as their absolute ruler under the overarching dominion of Nagash, the vampires set about learning much of the necromantic arts from their creator.

Eventually they became able to raise a host of the dead with their own magic, though none was more proficient in this than W'soran.

Nagash had already raised a vast army of undead creatures and foaming fanatics who worshipped him as their god and it was to this vast horde that Nagash appointed the vampires as his captains. All seven were commanded to fight as Nagash had chosen this time, while Alcadizaar had gathered all the armies of Nehekhar together, to finally crush those lands and people that had driven him out centuries before.

Nagash promised the vampires that in return for leading his armies against the Nehekharans, he will return to them the city of Lahmia. Using Nagash's arcane viewing devices, Vashanesh and his fellow vampires studied the dispositions of Alcadizaar's armies and plan their campaign.

The armies of Nagashizzar and Nehekhar met in many battles, with the war swaying backwards and forwards. First Vashanesh's legions of the dead had the upper hand, then the armies of Alcadizaar struck back, their chariots slashing through the reanimated ranks like scythes through wheat. At the fore was Alcadizaar, his great golden armour glowing with magical energy, his enchanted scimitar flicking faster than the tongue of a desert snake. The vampires were mighty necromancers and powerful foes. Where they marched, terror and dread came upon the enemy, yet they were not invincible and in time it became clear to Vashanesh that Nagash was not interested in his vampire vassals, nor yet in winning back for them lost Lahmia. Nagash simply wished to see the mortals of Nehekhar destroyed and if that meant the lives of all the vampires, then so be it. Nagash was content to sit and wait in Nagashizzar for the end. In fact since the war began, Nagash had raised Arkhan, his first and most trusted lieutenant,





back from death, revitalising the ancient vizier's soul that was trapped within its body. Since then, Vashanesh found that he was as bound to obey Arkhan's word as he was Nagash's. Vashanesh cursed Nagash's name, but could think of no way to free himself from the Great Necromancer's yoke.

At the height of the greatest battle of the war, upon the lush plains to the north and east of Khemri, Alcadizaar became surrounded by the undead horde and was battling for his life. Seeing this, a plan came to Vashanesh. Willing the horde to step back from the embattled king of Khemri, Vashanesh strode forward to

meet Alcadizaar in a duel. Despite the Khemrian king's skill it was plain to all that he could not hope to stand between Vashanesh and triumph. Just when all seemed lost, Alcadizaar swung wildly at Vashanesh's face with his bronze sword, and although Vashanesh could have parried the blade easily, he instead lowered his own sword, allowing Alcadizaar's blade to slice off his head. As Vashanesh toppled to the ground, the other vampires were suddenly freed of Vashanesh's, and therefore Nagash's, control. Almost as one they quit the field, leaving only W'soran following Nagash's orders.





WITH THE DEATH of Vashanesh and the flight of the other vampires, two-thirds of Nagash's legions were destroyed and W'soran was forced to flee back across the desert to Nagashizzar.

Great was Nagash's rage. He was not fooled by Vashanesh's plan and knew that the vampire king had allowed himself to be defeated rather than live out an eternity as Nagash's servant. So the Great Necromancer cursed all vampires, decreeing that they would never again feel the warmth of the sun but would ever more feel its bite. From that day to this even the greatest of vampires have been at the very least weakened and severely discomfited by the sun's light, if not destroyed outright by its brilliance. Other than W'soran and his own acolytes, Nagash did not see the other vampires. Neferata, Abhorash and Ushoran fled to the north and west, far from Nagashizzar. They say that Harakhte, the obsessive court vizier of Lahmia, fled far to the East, while Maatmeses headed south. Of Vashanesh, no one knew his fate. His body and his head could not be found after the battle, nor the ring Nagash gave him.

Nagash had no more patience for lackeys, and certainly none for the mortals who yet dared to defy him in Nehekhara. He vowed to turn the entire world into a kingdom of the undead, where no action would be performed, no deed done, save when he willed it. He would destroy all life and seal off the Gates of Chaos that the Druchii had spoken of so many centuries before. He would rule a worldwide cemetery peopled by the unquiet dead, where no being could threaten his dominion, not even the gods; the mortal world would forever be beyond their grasp. The first step was to be the elimination of his former homeland. For a decade, Nagash raged and



schemed, conceiving a terrible hatred of the man who had thwarted him and a plan for vengeance so dark that the gods themselves shuddered and turned their faces from the world.

It began slowly. Familiars carried warpstone charms wound round with fatal spells to the headwaters of the Great River Vitae and all the other major rivers and oases of Nehekhar, corrupting the springs with its energy until the water ran slow and red as blood. Across the whole empire the people sickened and died.

Nagash turned once more to the loathsome ratmen and bade the Council of Thirteen to lure tribes of orcs and goblins down from the Worlds Edge Mountains and herd them into Nagashizzar. The skaven had no idea what incomprehensible purpose this served but were content to take payment in huge sackloads of pure warpstone.

Folk died with great pustules marring their skin. Apothecaries and healers fell in the act of treating their patients. Men fled their families, dying even as they ran. For a season, death stalked the land until the dead outnumbered the living and corpses lay unburied and rotting in the street. Emaciated cattle wandered untended in barren fields until they too died. Every living thing in the Nehekhar's vast nation sickened. In Khemri, Alcadizaar could only watch in horror as his great empire was destroyed by a foe he could not defeat. One by one he watched his friends die, then his children, then his wife. He himself was spared, as if some malign power willed it.

Eventually he was left alone in his palace, weeping on his gilded throne, while in the distance he could hear the sound of a relentless army on the march.

Only after the dying was complete did they come: a vast army of the dead. The few sickly and wasted survivors of Alcadizaar's armies were no match for them. Immune to disease the undead marched from one end of the kingdom to the

other and did not rest until every man, woman and child, every beast, bird and hound they came across was dead. Only the liche priests were immune to the plague and only the liche priests had the power to fight back and hide themselves from the undead horde. Mortal as he was, Alcadizaar had not the strength or heart to fight. Arkhan took Alcadizaar and dragged him in chains to Nagashizzar and the foot of Nagash's throne.

Nagash explained to Alcadizaar all the terrible details of what would happen next to Nehekhar for its apostasy from his will. Nagash said that he intended to reanimate every corpse, every mummified cadaver and every skeleton in the empire and use them as soldiers to destroy all life in the world. Alcadizaar was thrown into the deepest dungeon of Nagashizzar to await the Great Necromancer's pleasure. Huddled there in the dark, I have no doubt that the defeated king recalled the glowing pits of Nagash's skull, Alcadizaar did not doubt Nagash had all the power and will to achieve this terrible end.



NAGASH PREPARED HIMSELF for the task ahead. In a daylong ritual, he consumed vast quantities of warpstone until his body burned with incandescent power. What flesh he had left attached to his bones was burned away and he became little more than a living skeleton wrapped in black armour. Hundreds and hundreds of drugged greenskins were led forth from the dungeons and were sacrificed on the

Nagash's altar one by one, while the Great Necromancer devoured the Sekhem of their souls.

For a full night and a day, as Morrslieb glared down from the heavens, Nagash chanted the syllables of this his greatest spell. In the dungeons below Nagashizzar the few remaining orcs shivered and howled. Across the continent all living things were disturbed by the darkest of nightmares. Strange lights glowed in the depths of the Sour Sea. From



the heights of his tower Nagash threw handfuls of glittering warpstone dust into the air. Cold winds carried it outward from Nagashizzar, even as it billowed and multiplied into a vast broiling cloud, until it fell as a black rain on all the cities, necropoleis and battlefields of Nehekhara. For a moment all was still, then across the land, the dead began to stir.

Legends say how the gods of men and daemons howled or wept as the souls and soul

fragments were ripped from their keeping and yet they could do nothing to prevent this horror, such was Nagash's awful power in that moment. Whatever the truth of it, dead eyelids flickered across the land. An impenetrable darkness rimmed with a faint purple aura entered hundreds of thousands of rotting eyeballs and empty eye-sockets. One by one the more recently dead corpses of the plague-stricken stood up and walked, while the more ancient dead of the great necropoleis pushed aside the lids of their sarcophagi and spilled forth from their tombs.

Driven by Nagash's indomitable will, long-dead warriors mounted their chariots and road forth into the haunted night. Wights emerged from their lairs and unclean things gathered. The innumerable dead formed up in disciplined ranks. The souls bound within the cerement-wrapped mummies of long-dead kings were awakened and compelled against their desire by Nagash's spell to leave their pyramid tombs to lead the remains of their subjects. Animated by Nagash's mighty will, the largest army the world had ever seen began to converge on Nagashizzar. It would never complete the march.

Exhausted by the vast expenditure of energy needed to cast the spell, Nagash descended back into his throne room and fell into a deep trance. Even as the undead army made its way there, an ominous silence fell over Nagashizzar. It was as if final and total death had come to the Great Necromancer's capital at last.

So great was the expenditure of power that it did not go unnoticed in other quarters. The Council of Thirteen at long last realised what Nagash was about to do and terror settled upon them. With the hundreds of thousands of undead warriors from all the ages of Nehekhara's history under his command, Nagash would be invincible. He would certainly



no longer need the skaven's aid and it probably seemed likely to them that the Great Necromancer might well repay them for their previous attacks upon his realm. Sensing that the Great Necromancer was quiescent for the moment, the Council realised that this might be their only chance to stop him. Crucial as the task was, they could find no skaven that they trusted to step forward and kill the Great Necromancer. Many of the Council doubted the efficacy of their weapons to kill Nagash, others simply feared that he would wake while they were in his throne room. They all knew of his awesome power and none wished to face him should that happen.



At last they hit upon another plan. Swiftly the Council joined its powers and within a matter of days created a blade of insanely corrosive power, wrapped round with runes, so inimical that they would eventually prove as fatal to its bearer as to Nagash. This was not a

matter that concerned the Council of Thirteen for none of them intended to carry the weapon. Instead they dispatched their boldest lackeys to Nagash's dungeons, bearing the killing blade in a lead casket. By secret routes the skaven made their way into the heart of the Great Necromancer's fortress. No sentries sounded the alarm and the ratmen came at last to the cell where Alcadizaar lay in chains.

With no explanation they freed Alcadizaar and presented him with the sword. As he grasped its hilt the king sensed the way to the necromancer's throne room, for the blade was enchanted to reveal the route. Ignoring the fleeing ratmen, Alcadizaar crept through the corridors of the deathly silent fortress. Eventually he found his way to the Great Necromancer's throne room. Silently he crossed the floor of black marble until he confronted the towering, silent figure of Nagash.

Nagash's eyes were dim and he made no move. The runes on his crown gave off no light. For a moment Alcadizaar wondered whether this was some evil trick, some new form of torture. Then he realised that he did not care. He raised his blade and brought it down in a flashing arc.

At the last moment, warned by some sixth sense, Nagash stirred and raised his arm to ward off the fatal blow. The skaven's enchanted blade cut right through his wrist and his taloned hand fell to the floor. So great were the sorceries permeating his body that the hand still maintained some animation and scuttled off into a dark corridor like a huge spider. Nagash was still exhausted from casting his spell of awakening, but even so he was powerful enough to destroy any mortal. He blasted Alcadizaar with spells that threatened to strip the flesh away from his body. From a great distance away the Council of Thirteen threw their power into protecting their human pawn.



Desperately using all their strength they managed to deflect Nagash's sorcerous attacks. A great hiss of frustration escaped the Necromancer's fleshless lips. Alcadizaar struck again, shearing through Nagash's ribs and breaking his spine. Nagash lashed out with his remaining claw and grasped Alcadizaar by the throat, throttling him. Jewels of blood stood out on the man's neck where the Great Necromancer's claws bit deep. Nagash lifted him one-handed and his feet left the ground.

Alcadizaar lashed out again, severing the Great Necromancer's arm at the elbow. He dropped to the ground and frantically hacked at Nagash. The skaven's daemonic runes finally began to take effect and all the unnatural vitality drained out of Nagash. His body, which had so long defied the ages, began to crumble away to dust. Sensing victory Alcadizaar pressed on, chopping the dying Necromancer into a thousand pieces.

Finally, when there was nothing left of Nagash but fragments of shattered bone, Alcadizaar lifted Nagash's crown and staggered from the fortress. This was the moment the skaven had been waiting for. Swiftly their raiders scuttled in and carried the fragments pieces of Nagash's body to his forges. Each bit of the Great Necromancer was burned in the warpstone-powered fires that he had used to create his dire devices and armour. Only his claw was unaccounted for and so part of Nagash lived on.

With the passing of the Great Necromancer, many of those animated by him fell back into dust. However, so great were the energies unleashed by Nagash's great summoning that they could not entirely be dissipated. Many of the former inhabitants of Nehekhara remained trapped in their ghastly undeath and slowly some of them made their way back to the places they knew best, warring amongst themselves for dominion. Of the

ancient kings prematurely resurrected by Nagash's spells, Settra was still the most powerful and he brought all of Khemri under his rule once more. Thus was born the Kingdom of the Dead.



Over the millennia since then, the kings and liche priests of Nehekhara learned methods of controlling the lesser undead of their lands using rituals adapted from those they had used originally to animate the ushabti and to bind the souls of dead kings to their bodies. Even the monuments of Nehekhara have been altered over the centuries to echo the deathliness of the civilisation within it. If one were to travel to that dead and arid area now, almost every statue and every flaking fresco, even the hieroglyphic script of that land, now bears emblems of skulls and death.





AFTER THE DESTRUCTION of Nagash, Alcadizaar wandered through the Cursed Pit driven half-mad by the horror he had witnessed and by exposure to the maddening influence of the Council of Thirteen's blade.

Although the fortress seethed with skaven, none but the maddest dared bar his way when they saw the weapon he carried

and those that did oppose him died almost instantly.

Alcadizaar fought clear of Nagashizzar. He had destroyed the deadliest opponent any mortal man had ever faced but the personal cost was high. The lethal energies of the weapon clenched in his fist were slowly killing him. His hand was scorched from where it gripped the blade and eventually he threw it into the great crevasse beyond Nagashizzar. Nagash's crown he kept.





Maddened and dying he wandered north into the Worlds Edge Mountains where he eventually fell into the waters of the Blind River. There he drowned and his frozen body was carried down into the Badlands, still clutching the crown in a ferocious death grip. In those days the Badlands were fractured, fought over by wandering nomadic tribes of humans and clans of orcs. Alcadizaar's frozen and frost-bitten body was found in the melting spring snow along the banks of Blind River, by Kadon, a shaman of the nomadic folk of Strigos, which was their name for the region. Kadon recognised Alcadizaar for the mighty warrior he was and ordered a barrow built for his corpse. There was something about the crown that attracted him and he kept it. Little did he realise that part of the Great Necromancer's spirit was infused in the crown and it fed the old man some of Nagash's secrets.

His dreams were full of whispered promises and his mind was filled with dreams of empires. Soon his was little more than a pale and petty shadow of Nagash's own will, corrupted as it was by the crown's whispered enchantments. He told his clan that they were to build a settlement on the site of Alcadizaar's burial mound. In time this settlement became a town and then a city which

Kadon named *Mourkain*, which in the tongue of his people meant, Place of Death.

His mind filled with dreadful visions, Kadon began to recreate the works of Nagash, inscribing the Great Necromancer's dark tale and committing much of his secret lore to paper. His vision was skewed by the crown and he took to worshipping Nagash as a god and forced his followers to do the same. Soon the cult of Nagash was reborn and undead things kept guard over its temples. Kadon himself was considered the most devout of Nagash's worshippers and prophet of their dark god.

Kadon was no mere acolyte but a potent sorcerer in his own right and, as his mind filled with the Great Necromancer's knowledge, he began to devise his own spells. He wrote his infamous grimoire in ink distilled from blood, in a volume bound with flayed human skin. Mourkain became the site of ever blacker evils. The Badlands were not fertile and the population of Mourkain was never great but with labour provided by the animated dead, citadels were built and barrows excavated. The Dawi of Barak Varr who had once traded with the humans, turned their faces from them and shunned them.

Drawn no doubt by the crown's power, Nagash's severed talon was found by Kadon's acolytes. He took the thing and wrapped it round with dreadful spells turning it into a powerful artefact which he used to cow his followers. At one point the armies of Mourkain laid siege to the Dawi fortress of Barak Varr but the iron-sheathed walls of the keep defeated them and they eventually withdrew. The necromancers of Mourkain became inward-looking and decadent, and the period of expansion was over but many of the slightly different traditions of the black arts that have arisen across the Old World and Araby find their roots in the works and dispersal of Kadon's disciples.



SOME HAVE DESCRIBED necromancy as the art of communicating with, and binding to one's service, the departed souls and spirits of dead mortals. Others have described it as the art of animating the corpses and skeletons of dead people. Others still have called it the pursuit of immortality. In fact necromancy is all these things, and more.

Necromancers by their very nature stand in defiance of the stranglehold of death and the control gods and daemons have over mortal souls. Put simply, though they are submerged in it, those who study the necromantic arts despise death, and seek to avoid it at all costs. Indeed, it is invariably short-lived mortals

rather than the longer-lived elder races who pursue a study of necromancy. I would imagine that because the Asur have such vast lifespans already they do not feel the bite of time's passage as shorter lived mortal might. The Dawi have no aptitude for magic in any event, and greenskins have little concept of their own mortality and do not fear death in the way humans do. Though inscrutable to one such as I, the skaven lived in pathological dread of their daemon-deity and are too caught up in their own scuttling pursuits to care for necromancy. It is rare indeed that any creatures other than humans choose to study the necromancer's art and set their feet on the road that will lead them either to everlasting life or eternal damnation.

Despite what the dull priests of Sigmar might say, those individuals who turn to necromancy are not necessarily evil. It is true that many of those attracted to the necromantic art may be already inclined to madness or desperate paranoia, for what else could lead a mortal man to pursue such an incredibly dangerous study? The loss of loved ones, dire need of power for a worthy cause, or simply the natural fear of death are all things that can drive a man to seek the forbidden lore. There are even some who undoubtedly desire knowledge for its own sake or seek to save their own lives or that of a loved one.

However, it is more than likely that a normal human who sets out on this path will eventually suffer for it. I believe it is the corrosive power that dark magic has over human minds that begins to turn those that study necromancy to madness — I do not believe that a normal human mind is built to manipulate dark magic without harm. As a result, necromancers are almost always shunned by all 'good' and 'upstanding' citizens of the Empire and witch hunters hunt them with the same zeal they do the worshippers of Chaos.



Great difficulty surrounds the study of necromancy. To learn the art, an aspirant must either find a necromancer and become his apprentice, or acquire one of the forbidden books of necromancy, such as the *Liber Mortis* or one of the *Nine Books of Nagash*.

Finding a tutor has its obvious difficulties. Necromancers shun the company of others

and unless supremely confident of their power, they seek to avoid discovery. Also, given the morbid reputation and dreadful habits of necromancers, it is perhaps safer to seek out the books. Many of those who have sought apprenticeship with a necromancer have ended up serving in a more menial way — as an animated corpse, for instance.





THESE BOOKS OF ancient lore have their own perils. Many are copies of old texts from forgotten times and errors have often found their way into the copying process. There is no guarantee that any of the rituals found in them are correct. Some simply do not work.

Others may go disastrously wrong, as when the infamous Jacques de Noirot accidentally animated all the corpses in the cemeteries of Moussillon and then found he could not control them. Imbued as part of the spell with an insatiable desire for human flesh, the animated corpses devoured the necromancer and then rampaged through the streets of Moussillon. They were only eventually destroyed by the intervention of the current Duke's household troops.

First and most famous of these evil tomes are the *Nine Books of Nagash*. In the unimaginably distant past Nagash, the Great Necromancer, wrote these dreadful volumes. In them is recorded the entire lore of the art. All other books of necromancy are based in some way upon these blasphemous tomes and although some new spells have been devised, all are in some way related to Nagash's own spells, or are weaker versions of derivatives of them. Many of the greatest spells of the *Nine Books of Nagash* are too demanding for mere mortals, for at his peak Nagash could rival the power of the gods themselves, but for a diligent student they hold all the information needed to become a necromancer.

Summoning and controlling the dead and the sacrifices needed to summon spirits, as well as the secret of prolonging life by stealing the vigour of the living, are also described in the pages of the *Liber Mortis*. The *Liber Mortis* is the best source of knowledge on necromancy available to most human scholars of the

Old World. It was written by the necromancer, Frederick van Hal, better known to later generations as Vanhal. There is one complete copy of this book under lock and key in the vaults of the Great Cathedral of Sigmar in Altdorf and can only be studied by the purest-hearted scholars and even then only after special dispensation from the Grand Theogonist himself. I have my own copy of this remarkable tome.

The *Grimoire Necronium* was written by W'soran. Apart from necromantic spells, it is filled with doom-laden prophesies of the future, telling of the world that is to come, where the Empire is in ruins, only the dead walk under the sunless skies and immortal vampires rule over pitiful slaves and hunt them for sport. It is said that any who read this W'soran's book succumb to a dark pit of insanity from which there is no return. I cannot say whether this is true

Those who practise this dangerous art face many dangers. Some try to extend their lives for decades or even centuries beyond their natural span. Sometimes they succeed and these individuals retain their physical body and what is left of their sanity but usually the result is far more horrible than death itself. Continual use of dark magic drains the soul and distorts the body and as time passes, a necromancer becomes more and more cadaverous in appearance.

Necromancers shield themselves from the deadly effects of dark magic by using the purple wind of magic, called Shyish, as a sort of metaphysical tongs to grasp dark and black magic, only to then channel this power through dead creatures or into their spirits. Despite these precautions, human necromancers will slowly be corrupted by their contact with the dark magic. In the end, and with very few exceptions, their keen intellect will be eroded, their bodies reduced to reek-



ing, walking corpses and their sanity will be lost in the sea of terrors that it faces in the world of the dead.

Necromancers are universally abhorred amongst humans. The men of the Old World

respect the dead and the priests of Morr and witch hunters tirelessly track down any who would defile the rest of the departed. Many an aspiring necromancer has perished in the cleansing flames of the witch hunters.





THE DENIZENS OF the spirit realm — that intangible and invisible aspect of reality that resides at the same time and space as the mortal world — are multifarious indeed. It is not simple enough to define the dead simple as spirits. Here follows a description of some of the more readily explained creatures and entities that have either been created by the birth of necromancy or, at least, who may be summoned, bound and controlled by using necromantic arts.

Only black magic, or Dhar, has the raw power to completely subvert the restrictions of the mortal world in the particular manner that is required to manipulate the dead, although naturally warpstone has always played a major role in the necromantic arts. Warpstone is in a sense the ideal that Nagash was seeking while wandering in the desert, for it is magic made manifest upon the mortal plane that, once formed, does not require the winds of magic to exist. It is the power of magic and, although it can be used to summon daemons or commune with gods, it is already manifest upon the mortal plane. As such it does not require continued interaction with the winds of magic, the Chaos Gates, or any other of the bridges between the divine realm and the mortal realm. It is Sekhem shut off from the daemon world, which in itself is the ideal of necromancy.

Walking dead or zombie — this is the simplest of all the creatures of undeath, in the senses of what it is, what it does and how it can be created. Essentially then, zombies are reasonably fresh corpses animated by the necromantic arts. Zombies must have their heads attached to their bodies to be animated properly, as the fact that they have brains,



however rotten, is the secret to the reasonable ease of creating them.

To create a zombie, a skilled necromancer need only animate a corpse still in possession of its brain, and then implant in that rotting brain whatever few basic commands he wants the zombie to perform. Once done, the zombie will remain animated and pursue the simple instructions lodged in its brain indefinitely, meaning that they can be left to their own devices if needs be.

To use the Nehekharan notion of the elements of a being, which are of course the principles upon which necromancy has been built, a zombie is Kha [corpse], Khaibit [has a shadow], and Sekhem [magic] to animate the corpse in the first place and implant simple commands into its brain. That is all.

The reason zombies are the most shambolic and sluggish of all the creatures summoned or created by a necromancer is because it relies more on its rotting body and brain to achieve its ends than it does magic, and, of course, its muscles are slowly wasting and the brain with which it reasons its simple motivations is also rotting. In fact it takes very little magic to animate a corpse, although the magic must be tightly controlled in very specific ways.

Skeletons — these are just what they seem to be the skeletons of mortals animated and empowered with dark magic. One might reasonably expect an animated skeleton to have less facilities than a zombie, which is, after all, a more substantial seeming creature, but in fact this is not the case. Animated skeletons have a greater dexterity and initiative than animated corpses precisely because they do not rely on rotting muscles and organs to do what they do.

Simply put, to animate a skeleton requires a greater amount of magic, both to hold the creature together and also to give it physical

strength and a purpose. Whereas a zombie is a corpse given an injection of magic, some basic drives or a task to fulfil, and then left to its own devices, a skeleton requires that the necromancer saturates it to a degree with magic, making it fractionally more powerful than a zombie. This means it takes a little more effort, and therefore time, to animate a skeleton than it does to animate a corpse with an intact brain and the necromancer must be of greater skill and have a more constant level of concentration and control to both create and then keep animated a skeleton.

So a skeleton is essentially Kha, Sekhem, Khaibit with a fragment of Ka [ego].



Golem — a golem is similar to skeletons and zombies, but greater than both. A golem need not be the remains of a dead mortal and can be instead a stone statue or even wooden sculpture, or any container. Essentially a golem is the pinnacle of what the animation aspects of necromancy. It is an artificial construct that is saturated with magic to give it motion and life, of a sort. Unlike skeletons and zombies, golems can be made to reason after a fashion, and so have a modicum of independent thought.



The ushabti of ancient Nehekhara could be viewed as a sort of golem, although they were animated and given purpose through rituals of divine magic rather than the art of necromancy. The benefit of golems is that they are stronger, faster and more stable than either skeletons or zombies. Once animated and given a limited identity and purpose, they will last even after the one that animated them has died — something that is rarely, if ever, the case with zombies and animated skeletons.

Golems make the perfect guards for they can appear as nothing more than statues and

have the wherewithal to differentiate between friend and foe if given the capacity to do so.

A golem can be made of almost any substance and in almost any shape but within that shape and substance is bound a considerable amount of Sekhem, ego and identity, or Ka, and it has a Khaibit.

Spirits or ghosts — these lost entities are the souls or soul fragments of dead mortals, trapped within the spirit world that lies on this side of the Chaos Realm. All around us are spirits and shades, all mostly as unaware of us as we are of them. These entities come into being because the low level of magic that saturates this world is enough to keep some souls and some aspects of coherent after death and bound to the mortal world. More often than not these souls will eventually be drawn out of the mortal world and into the Aethyr, where they will either disperse entirely into the raw energy of spirit, or they will be consumed or embraced some god or daemon.

Spirits are very difficult indeed to bind and force into manifestation unless the environment is quite saturated with magic — in a similar way to the manifestation of daemons, though requiring far less magic. Only the most skilled necromancers could ever hope to make use of these drifting shadows and spirit fragments.

It is rare indeed that a necromancer will be able to catch and bind the entirety of a dead person's soul before it begins to fragment or be drawn into the Chaos Realm. Usually a necromancer will be able to draw upon one fading aspect of a mortal's soul, like its anger or frustration [poltergeists], and make this aspect manifest itself and do his bidding. However, to bind and make manifest a spirit one must know exactly what aspect of a soul one is attempting to control and indeed the name of the being the soul once was must also be





known, either because the necromancer knew the spirit in life or because the necromancer has impelled the spirit to speak its name.

A ghost could be seen as Ka, Ren [name], Sekhem, and Ba [emotion].

Wraiths — wraiths are creatures of darkness and make no mistake of it. Those mortals who use dark magic to extend their lives, as indeed do necromancers, face many terrible dangers. Sometimes the necromancer succeeds in binding his soul to his body for all eternity, while others do not retain their physical body at all but remain bound upon the mortal plane while retaining their identity. Wraiths are like this.

They are mostly shadow or Khaibit and Ka, ego. They are cold and constantly need to replenish their Sekhem if they are to retain their form and identity and not fragment into just another wandering spirit. They do this by stealing the Sekhem from the living. In this

sense they are similar to vampires, although they are largely insubstantial shades driven from place to place while we vampires are manifest beings and may do as we please. To bind a wraith one must know its true name, Ren, from life.

Wights — one could describe a wight as the marrying of animation necromancy and spirit-binding necromancy, for a wight has a physical body, or Kha, but has also an almost complete soul and identity bound within it. It is not uncommon for a powerful necromancer to create a wight from a fallen warrior of particular skill, so that it may act as his protector.

Unless the soul of a dead person has been bound to his or her corpse through enchantments, or unless a particularly powerful and skilled necromancer is on hand as the person dies, it is nearly impossible to simply reinfuse the corpse of a dead warrior with its soul again. This is because the soul has





either fragmented into different drives and memories within the spirit realm or has been drawn into the Aethyr. Once in the Aethyr it is all but impossible to draw all the fragments of a soul back out and give them coherence, not least because one may have to wrestle with the will of a daemon to force the release of the soul. Only Nagash, first and greatest of all necromancers and almost like a god himself at the peak of his power, ever managed to reach into the Aethyr and pull out a soul complete. For the rest of us who might wish to create a wight, we must be content to prevent a soul dispersing into the Aethyr in the first place or else rely on

finding the interred who have been bound to their bodies by enchantment.

Essentially then, a wight is Kha, Khaibit, Ka, Ren, Sekhem and with a fragment of Ab.

Ghouls — ghouls are a particular form of degenerate human cannibal, altered by dark magic and their own self-perception. They are alive and they feed upon their dead, or indeed any corpse they find. However, though living, they are insane and have also lost certain aspects of their souls, meaning that they have no conscience and no real sense of identity or individual names.

They are Kha, Khaibit, Ka, Ba and Sekhem.





THOUGH USHORAN WAS not the natural leader Vashanesh was, nor yet the consummate politician that his elder sister Neferata was, he did possess a honeyed tongue for persuasion. Added to this, although he was nowhere near as skilled a warrior as Abhorash, his

truly immense muscular strength and stamina eclipsed that of all his trueborn sibling. Ushoran's only failing was that despite his incredible strength and immortality, he was ever a petty and insecure man. As a child he had never excelled, except in contests of strength, and as he grew older he found that he could gain little respect from the other nobles at court, despite being the queen's brother. His sister, for her part, cared little for him, for throughout their childhood together, Ushoran's feelings of unworthiness and insecurity had manifested themselves in his perpetual bullying of his sister.

As an adult, both before and after his rebirth into immortality, Ushoran found his place in Lahmian society as the Lord of Masks, he who planned and presided over all the great festivals and revelries of the court. Yet this only added to his sense that he was looked down upon by other nobles, for although they all enjoyed the maques he organised and his displays of strength and daring for their amusement, he was never taken seriously... until he supped the Elixir of Immortality.

After Vashanesh had sacrificed himself to be free from Nagash's dominion and before the remaining trueborn vampires had dispersed, Ushoran tried to convince his vampiric siblings that they should go forth as a group and forge for themselves a new land to rule. The other vampires were not interested in founding a new nation together, especially not one where Ushoran had a say in



its governance, for they were understandably frightened that such a nation would attract Nagash's attention and ultimately his vengeance. They mocked Ushoran, choosing to follow their own individual paths. Ushoran was furious and cursed them.

So the remaining trueborn had fled across the world and went into hiding for fear of attracting Nagash's gaze. Though they could trust no one, not even each other, they could depend upon the lesser vampires that they could create by bestowing the Blood Kiss, for these vampires were always in thrall to their sires. To this end, each of the first vampires created thralls for themselves at different points in their history, awaiting the time when they would reveal themselves once more. It came as little surprise to the other vampires when they learned that Ushoran, ever rash and desperate for attention, would be the first of them to emerge from hiding.

Ushoran wandered aimlessly through the mountains for many years, before circling back on himself into the lands which are today known as the Badlands. There he found the kingdom of Mourkain in the land of Strigos, which lay on the western foothills of the Worlds Edge Mountains. The kingdom was under the rule of Kadon, who bore artefacts that Ushoran recognised as belonging to Nagash. This revelation shocked Ushoran, but as he pieced together the story of how Kadon came by these artefacts, it became clear to him that Nagash must have died. Now he would forge this kingdom into a truly powerful nation with him at its head, with no fear of reparation being sought by the now destroyed Nagash.

Bringing all his powers of necromancy to bear and demonstrating his vampiric near-indestructibility to Kadon and his disciples, Ushoran was able to convince the mortals that he was in fact a messenger of the being they

took for a god — Nagash. Over the following decades he was able to create a small following of vampire thralls each of whom held high positions within the city's nobility. Within a century, the children of the Lord of Masks were holding many positions of importance in the capital of Strigos, Mourkain. Eventually



Ushoran deposed Kadon, killing the necromancer-king and claiming his artefacts. With these, Ushoran believed he would be able to control his sibling vampires who had so callously rejected him.

As ruler of Mourkain, Ushoran made certain that he did not repeat what he saw as the mistakes of the Lahmian court. He bade that his vampires only drank from those who



deserved to die — criminals, enemy captives and the like. With such a strong leader, the realm prospered and before long it became obvious to the other vampires that one of their kind must be behind the success; not that Ushoran did much to disguise what and who he was. In his folly, Ushoran sent his thralls out to seek the other trueborn vampires and bid them to come to his realm where together under his leadership they could found a new dynasty. His siblings were not so foolish, for they had learned that Ushoran possessed Nagash's crown and hand, and that with these he might have the power to subjugate them.

Neferata was the first to scorn Ushoran's invitation. She slew his messenger and drained him of blood, sending his bloodied

fangs that she had herself torn from his mouth back to Ushoran as a sign of her contempt. For her part, Neferata had built up a network of vampires amongst the flourishing tribes that would eventually become the Empire, and also amongst the peoples further south in the lands that would one day be known as Bretonnia, Tilea and Estalia. Making good use of this, her vampiric sisters used all their influence to goad the various chieftains and warlords of these lands of Ushoran's deadly power. From that day onwards the land of Strigos found itself beset from all sides.

The humans could only harry Ushoran's realm, for they had not the unity, allies or organisation to defeat his disciplined army, and nor would any human nation from the north until the coming of Sigmar Heldenhammer. Unfortunately for Ushoran, the fact that the northern barbarians harried the outlying towns and villages of his kingdom gave the greenskins of the surrounding mountains the confidence they needed to overcome their fear of Mourkain and the terrible fanged warriors within it. Before long a powerful warlord from amongst the greenskins known as Garsnag 'Cracktooth', and his shaman known only as 'Red Eye', led a massive horde of orcs towards Ushoran's capital.

Countless numbers of greenskins were amassed and ready to sweep through Ushoran's army, tired and depleted as it was from travelling its borders fighting the human tribes. Bellowing savage war cries, they smashed crude weapons on their shields, challenging the vampire's army. Ushoran knew they were outnumbered but he had little choice other than to fight the horde.

The orcs had underestimated the power of a trueborn vampire and in the first assault upon the city, Cracktooth himself was slain by Ushoran, who it is said tore the orc's head



from his body with his bare hands. None dared face the vampire king of Mourkain and the orc attack might have faltered had not Red Eye called upon the wild and untameable magic of his gods and struck down Ushoran, engulfing him in a green blast of burning energy.

Upon seeing their master destroyed, his vampiric progeny fled the battle knowing that the city was doomed. They desperately sought safety amongst their own kind, searching for the other vampires. They wandered for many months, skirting the lands of the barbarian men who had harried the borders of Strigos for so long. Eventually they reached the land that is now called Kislev where they found a small castle built along lines not dissimilar to those found in distant Nehekhara, albeit modified and built from different stones. A figure wrapped in a huge wolf-skin cloak came out to meet them, and there could be little mistaking who he was.

Vashanesh stood before the assembled vampires of Strigos silent and unmoving. They begged to be allowed to stay with Vashanesh and serve him in return for his protection. Vashanesh saw these Strigoi as even more petty and vindictive than their sire. He scorned them as worthless and told them he had travelled this far so that he would not have to meet with such pathetic creatures as they. The Strigoi took exception to Vashanesh's words and fully twelve of their number attacked him. Few escaped with their lives.

Each time these Strigoi came across other vampires they received similar treatment. Neferata's bloodline had been told by their queen to expose the Strigoi wherever they tried to integrate into human communities where the Lahmian sisters resided. Abhorash's progeny despised the Strigoi as representing all that was worst in vampires and went out of their way to hunt the Strigoi across all the lands of men. So it was that the

hunters had become the prey. The Strigoi were forced into hiding; everywhere they turned foes sought to destroy them.

Yet the final torment for these wretched creatures was that if they were ever to allay their hunger fully on the blood of sentient mortals, they were invariably consigned to preying on wandering bands of lepers and other derelicts, or else digging up the recently deceased to try and find some weak nourishment in their dead, congealed blood. For if they were to hunt too openly, then they risked attracting the vindictive attention of other vampires intent on exposing or destroying them. The readiest supply of human, or at least near human, blood that the Strigoi could feast on were the degenerates commonly referred to as ghouls who also haunted the hidden places, preying on the weak and on the dead. The Strigoi had little option but to live in this most vile manner with only their burning resentment to warm them.

The Strigoi found themselves driven by their hunger to those places where dark magic gathered more densely, so that their twisted souls could partake of the raw energy of magic when purer sustenance was hard to come by. Yet still the Strigoi were attracted to civilisation and they became ever more bitter and twisted as they watched the many races of the Old World grow strong. More than anything else they hated the other vampires for what they had been turned into — monsters lurking at the edge of civilisation.

Where they could, the Strigoi hunted wild beasts and vermin but such incognisant creatures could never truly satisfy their hunger. The bestial spirits of these creatures, when mixed with the blood of degenerate ghouls and the dark magic that was so readily drawn to the Strigoi, fashioned their once fine bodies into massive feral and beast-like things, a mockery of their former aristocratic selves.





AT THE SAME time Sigmar was founding his Empire, dark rumours drifted northward that an old evil had been reborn. The Council of Thirteen believed that they had destroyed Nagash, but they were wrong. So mighty a being, so adept at avoiding final death could not so easily be dispatched from the world. His corporeal form had been destroyed but his soul lived on. It waited before the gates of death, still rooted to the world by the presence of his claw, his crown and his tomb in the Black Pyramid. Nagash had long planned for the possibility of his death and part of his spirit and his power had been imbued in his crown, allowing him a foothold in the world of the living. Although it might take many centuries, Nagash would always return.

His body had been burned in the furnaces of Nagashizzar and all that remained of it were tiny particles of black sooty dust drifting on the wind. One by one these particles were drawn to each other. Down the long centuries clumps of them slowly coalesced in the Desolation of Nagash, forming black putrescent blobs that flowed inch by inch across the country to the Black Pyramid of Nagash in Khemri. At the rate of one drop a year the sarcophagus slowly filled with the vile black fluid, becoming a dark chrysalis within which the Great Necromancer was being reborn.

As the fluid congealed, parts clotted till they became hard as bone. Overlaying this ebony

skeleton, unnatural organs grew. Worm-like clumps of veins writhed and burrowed their way through newly forming muscles. A sinister carapace of horn-covered skin grew to cover the mass. Only the right hand, cut off by Alcadizaar, did not regrow. One dark night, centuries after his defeat by the skaven, the lid slowly rolled back from the sarcophagus at the heart of the Black Pyramid and Nagash emerged once more into the world.

Outside his tomb Khemri was still. Nagash stood atop his pyramid and bathed in dark power. Although still mighty beyond mortal measure he was but a pale shadow of his former self. He was weakened by his long sojourn beyond death and part of his power was still lost with his claw and his crown. He called upon the dead of Khemri but they hated him in death as they had hated him in life and he no longer had the power to bind them as once he had. He could control a portion of Khemri's countless dead but the others rebelled and for a time there was civil war within the greatest of the necropoleis.

Eventually Nagash tired of this conflict and visited the other cities of the dead. There the tale was the same. The dead remembered him and they hated him with an all consuming passion that only centuries of unhappy existence could breed. Although individually more than a match for any of these Tomb Kings, Nagash could not stand against the alliance that formed against him under the first Priest King of Khemri, Settra. For the second time in his



long existence Nagash was driven out of his native land. He brooded on his fall and decided once more that he would have to once again utilise the power of warpstone to bring back his strength and make his enemies pay. Once more he travelled north, setting his feet on the path he had so long ago followed to the shores of the Sour Sea. This time he was accompanied by an army of loyal undead followers, including his oldest ally, Arkhan.

At last he came to Nagashizzar and found the skaven entrenched there. For years they had mined the warpstone, using it for their own fell purposes until it was almost exhausted. Nagashizzar itself had become a gigantic warren for the ratmen although a comparatively less populous one, for no food would grow in the Desolation of Nagash and it all had to be shipped in from other holds in return for warpstone.

In one night the forces of Nagash swept through the Cursed Pit and overwhelmed the surprised skaven, driving them from the city. Nagash was now in control of his citadel but was angered beyond mortal comprehension to discover that the warpstone was almost exhausted. The devices he had used to refine, concentrate and purify it for his own sorcerous purposes were all destroyed. Even had they not been, there was no longer enough warpstone to allow him to recreate the Great Summoning. Undaunted by the armies the Council of Thirteen sent to reclaim Nagashizzar the Great Necromancer set to work. His first task was to set his undead lackeys to work crafting a great metal talon to replace his lost hand.

The artificial claw was cunningly wrought and covered in disturbing runes that hurt the eye. It was as flexible and useful as a normal hand and yet many times stronger. Now Nagash could once more hold a weapon and with his own hands he could create more



devices. He summoned the spirits of the dead and interrogated them for information and slowly, piece by piece, he reconstructed the events that had taken place during his long absence. He learned of the disappearance of Alcadizaar and how he had been driven to madness and death by the crown and exposure to the skaven's Deathblade.





FVENTUALLY NAGASH'S ATTENTION was drawn far to the north to where his crown now lay.

Wrapping himself in a black cloak and many powerful protective enchantments, Nagash set out in secret for the northern lands determined to reclaim what was his. Far were his wanderings and many were his battles on the hard road to the cold north, and as he passed through the ruins of Mourkain he summoned spirits to tell him what had happened there. He learned of Ushoran's folly and subsequent death, and he learned also of the orc shaman who had claimed Nagash's crown. He learned that the crown had driven the shaman to ever deeper insanity, until finally the orc was destroyed by one Sigmar Heldenhammer of the realms to the north of the Badlands, and the crown was in his possession. Sensing its utter evil, the young Emperor had refused to use it and kept it under lock and key within his

treasure vaults, far from the eyes of those who might be tempted by it.

So it was that Nagash arrived in the lands of the nascent Empire and took up residence within the long abandoned ruins of the elf city of Athel Tamara. This was to be his base from which he would scour the north in search of his crown. From the ruins Nagash sent messengers to Sigmar's camp, claiming his crown and offering untold riches for its return. A cowed figure, mounted on the back of a vast rotting bird descended on the tribesmen who quailed in terror as the dark figure dismounted and presented its master's demands.

However, Sigmar was not inclined to surrender the crown and, seeing their leader's resolve, the mortal warriors took heart. Their cheering was silenced when the messenger spoke once again, saying that they were fools to defy his master. Sigmar raised his great hammer Ghal Mharaz and smote the undead



thing. It collapsed in on itself leaving only a foul dark cloak behind. Sigmar ordered the remains burned.

Nagash spent many months gathering his strength. His spells raised legions of the dead from their burial mounds and other dark things came at his call until a mighty army of the undead was assembled — although no vampires answered his call. At last he was ready to make war against Sigmar and his followers. The great army of the walking dead marched through the forests of the Empire, killing all those they encountered. Those they killed swelled their army's ranks, those they spared were driven before the undead army to spread the word of its coming. Nagash understood how potent an ally fear was.

The men of the north were afraid. They had vanquished the orcs and driven all their enemies before them but now they faced a foe that filled them with dread. Of them all, only Sigmar was unafraid. He sent to his Dawi allies for aid, and they forged many potent weapons bound with potent magics for the undoing of their necromantic foes.

The two armies met on the banks of the river Reik in the late spring of the year 15 IC. It was an evenly matched and bitterly fought contest. Amid the killing two god-like beings walked. Sigmar led charge after charge of his Unberogens, Ghal Maraz turning him into a living engine of destruction as he waded through his foes. Mounted on a great black chariot, Nagash drove through the fray, a howling black runesword clutched in his mighty metal fist. In the centre of the battle the two titans met. Sigmar vaulted up onto the running board of the chariot and wrestled with the liche. It was a contest of awesome strengths that sent the two of them tumbling from the vehicle.

For an hour the two fought while the battle rolled on all around them. Nagash stabbed Sigmar in the arm, and the wound was poisoned. Feeling his strength seep away Sigmar

launched himself into a final berserk assault. The hammer became a thunderbolt in his hands. He struck home time and again, driving the Great Necromancer before him right to the banks of the Reik. Yet Nagash could sense that his foe was weakening and so fought on. Badly wounded, Sigmar threw himself forward once again. His hammer descended like a meteor. Nagash parried and the hammer was halted. For a long moment the two strained against each other. Sparks flew as their weapons met. The thunder of metal on metal drowned out the screams of the dying. Steel sinews pitted themselves against unnatural vitality. Cold blue eyes glared into awful empty sockets. Then at last Sigmar prevailed, knocking aside the Great Necromancer's blade and smashing his weapon down on the head of his foe.

As the Necromancer fell, a dark cloud emerged from his cracked skull and rose like a plume of poisonous vapour over the battlefield that screamed in a language unknown to the mortals gathered there. For not coming to his aid when he called them, Nagash once again cursed the vampires of the world, decreeing that for their cowardice they would ever more be driven back before the name of the one who had defeated their lord, Sigmar Heldenhammer, just as Nagash was now driven back.

The legions animated by Nagash's dark will collapsed. Skeletons fell into piles of bone, zombies stumbled and fell, and ghouls fled into the deep woods. Only when the battle was over did Sigmar stagger to his knees. It took the man-god many months to recover from the wound Nagash inflicted.

On the other hand it has taken the Great Necromancer many centuries to stir once more from his sarcophagus in Khemri — and, mark you, stir he does. We vampires feel it in our souls. At least now the Great Necromancer has learned a valuable, though doubtlessly bitter, lesson: there are powers in the world that can best him.





HIGH IN THE most inaccessible part of the Worlds Edge Mountains stands a desolate mountain top, commonly referred to as the Silver Pinnacle. A long time ago, the Dawi built a large stronghold here, for the Silver Pinnacle was an incredibly rich source of gemstones. The Dawi had been mining there for generations until one night an invading horde somehow broke into the mountain, taking the defenders by surprise. These were not greenskins or rat-men, as had plagued so many others of the Dawi holds but the walking dead led by a beautiful and pale woman. That woman was Queen Neferata of Lahmia.

Many centuries have passed since that time. The Dawi have long gone from the area and now only travellers from the lands of Men tread within sight of the place. Strange as it may seem, there are some who have visited Silver Pinnacle and returned alive to tell the tale — as, indeed, have I, perhaps uniquely of all vampires not of Neferata's bloodline. Tales from this place do not speak of horror as the less educated and more

superstitious might think. Instead they tell of a splendid court, arrayed in the manner and fashions of some ancient civilisation — Nehekharu — and of a palace cut out of the rock with statues and walls adorned with strange inscriptions. Yet this place is also one largely of darkness, where the light of day is permitted to enter only a few chambers. Here Neferata rules, though she keeps her identity secret, attended by handmaidens any mortal man would die for. Little do they know that this is often the literal truth.

Stories of the realm of the Night Queen have been told for centuries, and can be found among the ballads of Bretonnia, the writings of the Empire and the poems of Tilea. Even in the kasbahs of Araby and the sweat lodges of Kislev rumours of her can be heard. Is it any surprise that so many questing Bretonnian knights have sought this place, as have merchants seeking to sell their jewels and fine clothes to a princess?

The guards to this magnificent palace are swathed in black and do not show their faces. The interior of the palace is lit by thousands of smokeless candles and some rooms seem to glow by themselves, as if lit by moonlight. The



queen of the mountain is never seen or spoken to directly. She conducts business from behind seven veils and her voice is beguiling. There are stories that say the queen breeds cats of surpassing beauty and affection and, or so the stories say, strange magical powers.

Perhaps these tales are related to such stories as are told around merchant campfires, like the one that tells of a Tilean merchant who found a cat upon the road. Halfway to Tilea the cat was gone but sitting in his wagon was a beautiful lady. He had no idea where she had appeared from but wisely took her on to Tilea, asking no questions, where she bade him farewell and paid him for the journey.



There is another tale, told in Bretonnia, of a questing knight who returned with a lady of exquisite beauty and a pale complexion praised by Bretonnian troubadours. He made her his wife and lady of his castle. Guests at the castle commented that the lady never dined with others but always seemed in the best of health. There are similar strange tales which reveal, to those wise enough to see, how the bloodline of Neferata has spread over many centuries into many lands.

All of Neferata's bloodline, with few exceptions, are female. It is said that after having her

rule rejected by Nagash in favour of Vashanesh, and after Abhorash, who claimed to have loved the queen for centuries, left her without a backward glance, and finally after Vashanesh found for himself a mortal consort, Neferata has grown to despise and utterly distrust men. Instead enchantingly beautiful maidens are chosen from across the Old World and beyond and are granted the Blood Kiss. To these new vampires is passed their mistresses distrust of men, her hedonism, self-indulgence and aptitude for politics. It is said, and my own experiences with them confirms it to be true, that they will stop at nothing to get what they desire.

They strive to gain control of the mortal realms through cunning and intrigue. No other vampires excel in infiltrating human society in the same way as this shadowy sisterhood. The presence of the Lahmian sisters is seldom noticed, but their hand is certainly felt. They may lack the strength of some of the other Bloodlines, but in subtlety and cunning they are unmatched. Their great talent for art and statesmanship and their powerful personalities hold an almost irresistible charm for mortals.

The talons of the Lahmians reach to all levels of human society. They take an active interest in human affairs and no one can guess how many powerful and erratic noblewomen, widows of princes and dukes, and highborn ladies who shun the light of day and lock themselves in tall towers and opulent palaces, are in truth the daughters of Neferata. However, their temper matches the quickness of their bodies and they are easy to anger but hard to appease.

The greatest strength of the Lahmians, as I see it, is that they keep in constant contact with each other and with their queen. What the Lahmians' true goal is I cannot say but I cannot shake the feeling that they are preparing their hand for the end stages of a game that only they know all the rules to.



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ABHORASH, OF ALL the trueborn vampires, did not wish to sup of the Elixir of Immortality but from the day he first saw Neferata he knew that he was in love with her. He would do anything and everything she bade him to and thus she bade him drink of the elixir.

Like all of our kind, Abhorash was helpless against the thirst that overcame him. For many days he tried to fight his desire for living blood but one dark night he could not help his craving and slaughtered many of his own subordinates in the palace guard. Realising the futility of denying his fate and unable to stop his love for his queen, Abhorash had little option but to join Neferata's court. It was at his recommendation that the queen decreed a set of laws for the vampires of Lahmia to follow. They would hide their presence and only feed off those worthy of death. Although Abhorash abided by his own code, many of the other vampires thought themselves above such laws and carried on as they had

before. In this respect Ushoran was the worst offender of all, earning himself Abhorash's undying contempt. So it was that the rumours of Lahmia's unholliness spread beyond its borders.

Abhorash was irreversibly changed as he saw his beautiful city razed and his people slaughtered. His once proud realm, which used to be scattered with oases and desert gardens, was now a torched, barren land. Nothing living stirred in Lahmia, though to this day the dead do not rest in their graves there. He vowed to be the enemy of all mankind for eternity.

Once Vashanesh had allowed himself to die in order to free the vampires from Nagash's direct control, Abhorash turned his back to the lands of the south and travelled north with four disciples, slaying all who crossed their path and gorging themselves after years of denial and restraint. To this day, it is said that the orcs of the Badlands still fear the throat-rippers who once slew five whole tribes. Even the Dawi fear Abhorash, for often they would send supplies to an isolated stronghold or mine only to find that all the



inhabitants had been butchered by the merciless killer.

Legend has it that Abhorash headed ever northward with his disciples, seeking a sign that would give a new purpose to his existence. After many years he came to a mountain with a pinnacle wreathed in fire. Ignoring the advice of his followers, he decided to scale the face.

As Abhorash reached the summit, a blood red dragon of immense size emerged from the crater and descended on the vampire lord. For an entire night Abhorash and the great wyrm fought and in the end the vampire was victorious. As the dragon lashed in its death throes, Abhorash seized its throat with his fangs and drank deep.



Intoxicated by the blood of the dragon, Abhorash cast the broken carcass of the red dragon down from the mountaintop and emitted an exultant cry of victory. His search had ended. After drinking the blood of the dragon, Abhorash no longer craved the vitae of men. He had found an escape from the hunger of vampirism. He had become the ultimate warrior, a man with the strength and powers of a vampire, who had no need to hunt for blood.

He bid his vampiric minions to go forth and hone their martial skills, so when their prowess equalled his own they could also escape the curse

of vampirism and become free of the predator inside them. Since that day, Abhorash's immortal sons have called themselves Blood Dragons in the memory of the great dragon vanquished by their mighty sire and they have sought to perfect their martial abilities in order to be worthy enough to rejoin with their master.

Walach was the favoured disciple of Abhorash and it was he who is best known of all his Bloodline, after his sire. Legends tell of a respected order of knights, the Ordo Draconis, who were as well regarded as any in the Empire. Their great fortress-monastery, the Blood Keep, guarded on of the passes to Bretonnia and was famed for the strength of its walls and valour of its defenders.

As the *Tome of Lamentations* tells, one night a man of great stature and noble bearing appeared at their gates and demanded to join the order. He announced that he was Walach of the line of Abhorash and when he was admitted inside the doom of the order was at hand.

Perhaps because the name of this knightly order reminded him of his sire's great feat, in one single terrible night Walach had chosen to infect the knights with the gift of immortality and became the new Grand Master of the Order. The strongest, the most skilful and the most brave he made into vampires, while the rest he slew and raised to serve him and his new brethren as wight men-at-arms. From then on, instead of protecting those who sought to traverse the pass the guarded, these vampire knights preyed upon them like a pack of voracious wolves, ever seeking opponents upon whom they could perfect their skills. In time, however, the knights found maidens for themselves whom they bestowed the Blood Kiss upon, so that they might be the eternal brides of the order.

For many long years the Blood Knights kept their true nature a secret from human society, killing every witness to their excesses and



disposing of the bodies. Finally the Templars of Sigmar, attracted by reports of whole caravans going missing in the lands around the pass, discovered the terrible truth.

Four entire Empire Templar orders mustered to destroy the vampire knights, eager to prove their prowess and virtue. The Blood Keep was besieged. For three long years the vampire order held out until their gates were finally breached and their keep was put to the torch. Faced with an overwhelming force, the vampire knights reluctantly abandoned their ancestral home. They were hunted by Sigmarite knights and witch hunters alike and it was believed that all of them had perished. The Blood Keep fell into ruin and its evil legacy was all but forgotten.



The truth is somewhat different. When their fortress-monastery was razed, the knights of the Blood Dragon became separated from each other. They fled their pursuers and went to the lands of Bretonnia, Estalia, Tilea and beyond. They can now be found across the Old World; sometimes guarding places like bridges and fords, challenging all who pass by to test their mettle and hone their combat skills. Others hide amongst humans in the corrupt cities of the Old World, living as mercenaries, assassins, or soldiers and only their immense skill, incredible strength and the gleam in their eyes hints at the hunger that rages in their blood.

I see the Blood Dragons as dull and devoid of imagination. Unlike those of my own bloodline, the Blood Dragons have no ambition to supremacy over lesser beings, nor do they try to raise huge armies. The principles and ideals of the Blood Dragons seem to be more concerned with the martial prowess of individuals, rather than attempting to create anything lasting. The blood of their ultimate sire makes them warriors without equal, for Abhorash was the greatest of the warriors of ancient Nehekara. This power does not come without a price, for they are obsessed with their prowess at arms. Their entire being is devoted to war and death. Their way is the way of the sword, each one striving to become the perfect warrior. Each competes against the others and every word uttered carries a hidden challenge. Without their iron discipline the Blood Dragons would soon succumb to anarchy.

Now, centuries after the demise of their order, men whisper that the Blood Keep is inhabited again and that immortal knights feast on human blood in its halls. Once more the old legends of the knights that hunt for blood are told in hushed voices by foolish mortals. I have had the displeasure of meeting several warriors of this most martial bloodline, all of whom I have slain through my own skills at arms and necromancy combined. Still they gather in their great feasting hall once every fifty years, to perform the rites of brotherhood in a parody of the holy feasts of the templar orders of the Old World. They drink warm blood from silver chalices and recite their ancient oaths of loyalty.

Although I cannot confirm or deny the rumour, it is said that their lord Walach still commands them as the Grand Master of the Ordo Draconis as they strive for perfection, practising different fighting styles unceasingly. As with all our kind, I doubt all their obsessive discipline truly calms the blood raging inside, or gives them peace.



HAVE SPOKEN OF how the art of necromancy was first brought into the Old World, and how the vampires were driven forth from their city of Lahmia to seek shelter with the Great Necromancer Nagash. During the great battle against Alcadizaar the vampire alliance crumbled and each of the trueborn vampires decided upon their own course of action. W'soran was the only vampire to remain loyal to Nagash. As the other vampires fled the field, W'soran remained at his master's command. He hoped that if he stayed with Nagash his master would reveal more of his Necromantic secrets.

So W'soran led a massive horde of skeletal warriors against Nehekara, riding at the forefront of the army, casting his corrosive magic across the battlefield. As the bloodied bodies of his foes fell to the sandy desert floor, smashed by dark bolts of crackling energy, he would bind their bodies to his will, commanding them to rise and fight against their own kinfolk. The battle was savage and Alcadizaar's army was weakened by the dread plague that had swept across the land. The horror of having to fight their own mutilated and plague-ridden friends and family summoned from their graves led to Alcadizaar's army crumbling under the massed assault.

Nagash was pleased with his apprentice and as a reward gifted W'soran with copies of his near mythical Nine Books, the books that I myself now use as one of the templates for this great history. During this period studying under Nagash, W'soran learned much of the 'other' realm of death that exists on top of this mortal world. Unfortunately for the vampire trueborn, his

master was slain by Alcadizaar only a year after he had risen to power. Nonetheless W'soran and his own acolytes escaped, carrying with them as many of Nagash's books and artefacts as they could find. W'soran did not harbour the ambitions of the other vampires. Conquering the world of mortals was not enough for he who believed in Nagash's dream. He sought to bring to fruition his master's plan of ending all life in the world and thereby ending any interest or influence the gods could have in the mortal





realms, for if nothing lived, no one could worship the gods and no mortal souls could the gods win. W'soran knew that if he were to achieve power enough to achieve this end, then it would come from knowledge of the spirit world that was the essence of his very being.

With no aspirations to build a great nation, he was not inclined as were the other vampires to create an army of thralls. He left with his handful of disciples for the empty and haunted palaces of Lahmia, the one place he reasoned no other vampire would return to.

In time W'soran grew decadent. His studies of the spirit world and the ways of necromancy became an end in their own right, and he lost sight of his master's vision. It was this that ultimately led to his undoing. Powerful though he was, W'soran had to enter a trance-like state to interact with the spirit world. Yet his finest and most diligent student, a fervent Nagashi disciple named Melkhior, seized one such moment to use to his advantage. Who knows what finally pushed Melkhior to betray his master? Perhaps Nagash spoke to him from beyond, telling him to slay W'soran; perhaps he

perceived his master's lack of purpose. Perhaps, as I myself believe, he looked down on W'soran, for Melkhior was able to interact with the spirit world without need of entering into a trance. Whatever the case, Melkhior leapt at his master and ripped out his throat, draining him of every last drop of blood, before eating his entire body over the course of three days so as to assure he absorbed all his master's essence. From that moment on, Melkhior was hailed as the master of his bloodline, a bloodline that he named Necrarch to symbolise their sanctification of death.

To my mind, Necrarchs are perhaps the most terrifying of all the lords of the night, at least to mortals. They are certainly the most disgusting. Most vampires retain their human features when they are granted immortality with the Blood Kiss but something in the blood of the Necrarchs is tainted and foul. Their physical corruption begins as soon as they are changed. Skeletal and reeking with the stench of charnel houses, the Necrarch vampires are truly an odious sight.



I think it is clear that all vampires of the Necrarch bloodline must be insane, for the secrets they study and to the depth that they study them are terrible indeed. The eyes of a Necrarch vampire see the world of the living as a blurred image, but to them the world of the dead, the disembodied spirits, lost souls, wights, wraiths and all manner of such related things are crystal clear and far more real to them than the blossoming life of the mortal world.

Vampires of the Necrarch bloodline are not much concerned with the petty world of men. They walk the paths of the realm of death. They are wise beyond mortal reckoning and imbued with many secrets of necromancy. The knowledge they hold would be enough to drive mortal men to their death through sheer terror. Necrarchs seem prone to living in high towers where they can study the heavens and the winds of magic. Necrarchs are masters of alchemy and the mystic arts. In their dusty chambers they make potions to enhance their already incredible, if mad, intellects.

From their towers the Necrarchs cast great spells during the dark nights of Geheimnisnacht. The purpose of these sorceries is always the same — to kill all living things within the reach of their Necrarch. From their dark abodes, corruption slowly spreads, poisoning rivers, withering

forests and causing animals and men to sicken and die. Clearly the Necrarchs are determined to strangle all life from the known world, which is probably why the witch hunters revile the Necrarchs above all our kind, and spare no effort trying to eradicate them. Unfortunately, finding these elusive creatures is the most difficult task a vampire slayer can set himself.

Because of their rarity, many of the so-called scholars of the Empire doubt whether the



Necrarchs really exist. I assure you, in the dark places of the world, hidden from the eyes of mortal authorities, the Necrarchs continue their slow, insidious work. One day, perhaps when their god awakens fully, their labours will bear fruit, and the world will know horror unlike any before.







IN THE EASTERN border of Stirland, in the cold shadow of the Worlds Edge Mountains, lies Sylvania, what many mortals regard as the most ill-famed region in the whole Empire. This land of bleak hills, blasted moors and mist-shrouded forests is shunned by all sensible travellers. Only the most foolhardy mortal would venture forth after dark and it is rare that a questing knight or weary pilgrim will ever accept shelter within the brooding castles that tower over the land. By night, the brutish peasants in their squalid villages lock and bar their doors, foolishly hanging bundles of witchbane and daemonsroot over their shuttered windows, in the vain hope that these protective herbs will ward off those who haunt the night. Even the notoriously brutal and fearless tax-collectors of the Elector of Stirland wear amulets blessed by the priests of Morr and Sigmar and go about in companies fifty strong when their lord compels them to seek his due there.

For as long as any man can remember, dark tales have been told of Sylvania. The odds are good that if ever some foppish tavern bard is reciting a grisly ballad, or a court poet

inscribing a story of horror, then the setting will be in Sylvania.

There are more dark legends concerning Sylvania than of all the other Imperial provinces put together, and most of these tales contain a solid kernel of truth; though admittedly the foolish mortals of the Empire embellish them and rigidly fear that which they do not understand. To be fair, however, this is indeed a land where unquiet spirits, necromancers and even my vampiric brethren still walk openly beneath the moons' pale light.

The oldest recorded incidence of what some might call the troubling nature of Sylvania dates back to the time of the Great Plague of **1111 IC**, which appeared simultaneously right across the Empire. The plague spread quickly eastward and devastated the population of Sylvania. Corpses remained where they perished as those still living were too terrified to go near them. Although the scholars of the Empire still debate it, this plague was in fact a machination of the vile ratmen who chose to decimate the population of the Empire before launching a massive invasion in **1115 IC**.

Although the so-called Skaven Wars went on for another nine years or so in the wider Empire



until Count Mandred ‘Skaven Slayer’ was elected Emperor, in Sylvania the skaven were driven back long before this. On the fateful Geheimnisnacht in that same year of **1111**, when Morrslieb shone with terrible emerald witchlight and a hail of incandescent meteorites rained down on Sylvania, astrologers and soothsayers prophesied catastrophe. This star-fall was indeed a sign of ill-omen — for the skaven at least. Rotting corpses, marked with the black blotches of the plague, refused to stay in their graves. Dead fathers came back to claim their children. Rotting wives returned to lie with their husbands. Even the degenerate ghouls fled from overflowing cemeteries and charnel houses whose inhabitants would not stay at peace.

At that time, Baron Frederick van Hal ruled Sylvania. He had come to power in **1106 IC** and had immediately set about rooting out the corruption within the province authorities that had been so endemic since the notorious Boris ‘Goldgather’ ascended to the Imperial throne a few years before. With the coming of the plague and the sudden waking of the dead, everything changed for van Hal.

Just when things seemed too intolerable, a pale nobleman arrived at the gates of Vanhaldenschlosse. The nobleman called himself Prince Vladimir and he offered the desperate baron a way to both control the undead rampaging across his province and drive away the skaven. He told of the legacy of Kadon, a man of great power whose memory is shrouded in myth and fear, for Kadon was in possession of ancient items of power that could turn the tide for van Hal — or so Prince Vladimir claimed.

Vladimir revealed that he had brought these artefacts to van Hal, though he gave no reason as to why he would be so generous. In fact they were the *Nine Books of Nagash*. Van Hal had only heard of Nagash from various legends

concerning Sigmar but was curious to know what the books could teach him. With the help of Prince Vladimir, van Hal used knowledge gleaned from the books to take control of the hordes of wandering dead that plagued the Sylvanian countryside. In the absence of enough mortal soldiers, van Hal turned the undead against the skaven that were in the process of overrunning the province, as they are doing with the rest of the Empire. Though disturbed by the power revealed to him, van Hal was delighted that the Chaotic enemies had finally being driven back at a minimal cost to the lives of his people. Whenever his army of zombies had been struck down, he simply resurrected them to continue the fight.

Whatever the rights or wrongs of it, van Hal, or Vanhal as he became known to later generations, soon became the most infamous necromancer in imperial history. It was he, with the uncelebrated help of Vladimir, who wrote the infamous *Liber Mortis*, his masterpiece adapted initially from Kadon’s translation of the *Nine Books of Nagash*.

Yet not content with this flawed translation of the Great Necromancer’s works, Vanhal made many pilgrimages to the Kingdom of the Dead. Protected by his ever present ally, Vladimir, and the most potent of sorceries, he communed with the inhabitants of certain tomb-cities and probed the darkest secrets of ancient times. He consulted with howling daemons on Geheimnisnacht and sifted nuggets of truth from their lies. For even the daemons of Chaos remember Nagash’s infamous deeds. It is to the *Liber Mortis* that the Old World owes its partial knowledge of the history of the Great Necromancer and the ancient land he once ruled and destroyed.

All across Sylvania, the skaven and the undead expended their strength in a long and futile war that was eventually to cause the downfall of both. Vanhal was assassinated by his



ambitious apprentice Lothar von Diehl who was himself driven out of Vanhaldenschlosse by a band of knights apparently led by his master's ghost. After von Diehl's disappearance, lacking a guiding intelligence, the undead armies wandered the land aimlessly, slaughtering the living, but being destroyed piecemeal by their human, skaven and orc opponents.

It took many centuries for the Empire to recover from the ravages of the Black Plague. Sylvania never really did, at least by mortal measures. The population was reduced to a

tenth of what it once had been and the incidence of mutation and disease was many times greater than anywhere else in the Empire. In addition, forever after the Great Plague, the dead of Sylvania showed a tendency not to stay buried. This problem accounts for the infamous Sylvanian custom of burying corpses face down in their coffins so that if they try and dig their way out they burrow downward. Of the mysterious Prince Vladimir, there are no records concerning his fate in the immediate aftermath of the Skaven Wars.



IN THE YEARS following the Great Plague, Sylvania acquired a terrible reputation. The peasants became a byword for close-mouthed sullenness and stupidity. The thin soil of its fields produced fewer crops than anywhere else in the Empire. Famine and blight were common. Few merchants traded in the area, for there was little money to be made. Only the most desperate of outlaws lived in its profitless and haunted forests.

Around six hundred years after the death of Vanhal, the ruling house of Sylvania were the von Draks, a thin-blooded, decadent and lazy family who were half-hearted in the pursuit of their feudal duties and had a history of congenital idiocy and insanity. It is said they were the only house in the Empire not to send at least one son to the Crusades in Araby. The rest of the nobles of the region were little better. Many were petty-minded, oppressive and thoroughly corrupt men, little better than bandits, who fought and raided amongst each other with no respect for higher authority. The remainder were ineffectual cowards with no taste for war or other noble pursuits.

Sylvania became a backwater shunned by the rest of mankind, and in its shadowy corners dreadful things went about their business unhindered. Like a magnet it drew evil sorcerers who could pursue their study of dark magic undisturbed by the authorities. Occasionally word of dark deeds drew the attention of witch hunters or one of the ferocious Templar orders and the woods were scoured, a process which the local nobility neither helped nor hindered. Otherwise the slow growth of the powers of evil in the land went unchecked. This eventually caused Grand Theogonist Jurgen VI to call for a crusade against Sylvania.

Unfortunately this was during the time when there were three separate claimants to the Imperial throne and the Empire was too

fragmented to respond and thus the von Draks maintained their corrupt and ineffectual rule over their blighted land.

The nadir of this dark period came centuries later when Vlad von Carstein took over the rulership of Sylvania. The tale of how the first of the infamous Vampire Counts came to power is a pitiless one. It began on the storm-lashed night when Otto, last of the mad von Drak counts, lay on his death bed, cursing the gods that he was without a male heir. Otto swore he would marry his daughter Isabella to a daemon of Chaos itself rather than let his hated brother Leopold inherit. He had already refused to give her hand to every one of the nobles in Sylvania, for he despised them all, and no one of high blood from outside the region wanted to marry an heiress from that land.

Otto was a man of petty evils, given to putting the heads of peasants on spikes at the slightest provocation and when mad with drink, he was convinced he was Sigmar reincarnate. The nobles who should have been his liegemen had no respect for his authority and paid no attention to his commands. All of Sylvania seethed with civil strife. Yet even still, on his deathbed the dying man lay unrepentant.

Outside, the thunder rumbled and lightning split the storm-black darkness. Victor Guttman, the aged priest of Sigmar who had been called to shrieve the old count, fainted dead away. Then from out of the storm came the sound of wheels. A great black coach drew up outside the keep and a heavy hand smote the door a ringing blow and a cold voice demanded entry.

The castle gate swung open on its hinges before any men-at-arms could react and the visitor was revealed. The dogs ceased to howl and slunk away. The stranger was tall, dark and proud, and of noble bearing and aspect. No one stayed his entry and he marched to the count's chamber.



His accent was foreign, perhaps from Kislev, and he recited his noble antecedents to the count, claiming Otto's daughter's hand for himself. Looking into the stranger's cold eyes the count perhaps regretted his rash oath but he could deny the stranger nothing. The old priest was roused and he performed the marriage ceremony before the dying man's bed. Then Otto expired, leaving his daughter in the charge of Vlad von Carstein. The new count's first act was to cast the protesting Leopold through the window of the highest tower of Castle Drakenhof.

Vlad seemed as eccentric as old Otto. He never ate in the servants' presence. He never walked abroad by day unless he could avoid it. He dismissed the Sigmarite priest and sent him from the town. No one ever saw Victor Guttman again. Soon, many of the old servants at the keep were dismissed and mysterious swarthy strangers from the east took their place. However, the new count was less overtly oppressive than the old one and so the folk got on with their daily business, ignoring the hooded and cloaked foreigners that often visited the castle. Years of von Drak rule had taught the peasantry not to question the deeds of their betters. At least the new count didn't order senseless executions for his pleasure or demand the exorbitant taxes as the old one had.

No one doubted the count's prowess in battle. When the company of Bernhoff the Butcher rode into town and demanded tribute, the count cut the mercenary down as if he were a stripling, although Bernhoff was a famed warrior. He then proceeded to slaughter the entire mercenary band while his personal bodyguard watched impassively, taking no part in the bloodbath. The count's popularity was assured. Within his realm laws were kept, the guilty were punished and bandits were kept at bay.

Word reached the village that Isabella had fallen sick with an incurable illness and was

slowly wasting away. One of the physicians who tended her claimed her heart had stopped and that she had died. The new count said this was not so. He dismissed the learned doctors, claiming he would care for her with his own hands. Three days later she appeared in front of her folk, saying she was fully recovered and it appeared to be so, although she was ever afterwards pale and wan and never left her chambers save by night.

At first none of the feuding nobles of Sylvania paid any heed to the commands of the new count; they were too wrapped up in their own bloody quarrels and rivalries to listen to the edicts of one they saw as a usurper. If this bothered Vlad von Carstein he gave no sign of it. He calmly proceeded to rebuild estates which had suffered from centuries of neglect. A farmer who had newly inherited a herd of cattle could not have paid more attention to the running of his lands. He cherished his tenants as a peasant family cherishes a beast they are fattening for the Hexensacht feast. After decades of rule by mad Otto this was all welcomed. In time, however, young girls and lads from the villages began to disappear and the dead were said to have begun to stir once more. These were few in number at first and they did not attack any of the count's possessions but they harried those who disobeyed his authority.

If the waking dead did not see to the rebellious Sylvanian nobles, then they fell victim to strange accidents.

Baron Heinz Rothermeyer was eaten by wolves. Baron Pieter Kaplin was found dead in his rooms, eyes wide open, hair turned white as he had died in terror. His wife went mad, and passed away soon afterwards. The bandit lord Boris Earbiter was found hanging upside down from a tree, his body entirely drained of blood. Only those who had sworn fealty to Vlad von Carstein seemed immune to these depredations. Soon, the renegade nobles were queuing



to swear fealty to him. Within ten years, and with no apparent application of military force, von Carstein was more firmly in control of Sylvania than many Electors were of their states.

Years blurred by. Generations of peasants were born and died in Drakenhof and still Vlad and Isabella von Carstein ruled, apparently



unchanged by the years. At first, few paid any attention to their longevity. The lives of peasants had always been nasty, brutish and short and nobles had always enjoyed vastly longer life spans. However, when the oldest woman of Drakenhof claimed that her grandmother had been a girl when von Carstein came to the throne even the dim-witted and illiterate peasantry of Sylvania began to suspect that all was not as it seemed.

Perhaps unsurprisingly more and more witch hunters were drawn to Sylvania. Those who

chose to investigate von Carstein were never seen again but worse was to come. The disease which had first laid Isabella von Carstein low began to strike other noble families allied with the Count. Soon all the major castles in Sylvania were home to long-lived, nocturnal folk. The number of the living who went missing became increasingly noticeable. The temples to Sigmar were closed. Watchposts were set up along the border and few were allowed to pass. More than any other state in the divided Empire, Sylvania became a land apart.

On Geheimnisnacht 2010 years after the birth of Sigmar, the truth about Vlad von Carstein was revealed. As he stood on the battlements of Drakenhof Keep and intoned an incantation from one of the pages of the *Nine Books of Nagash*, all across the land the dead stirred. Skeletons clawed their way through the soft Sylvanian soil, the corpses of the recently deceased stirred in their crypts and ghouls raced from the forests to gather around Drakenhof. Von Carstein had thrown down the gauntlet to the three Emperors. The Wars of the Vampire Counts had begun.

The Sylvanian armies headed north-west, driving for Talabheim, capital of the Ottilia, one of the three claimants for the Imperial throne. The undead force was huge. The vampire aristocracy of Sylvania led hordes of skeletons and zombies. The peasant levies marched alongside their masters, fighting for them as they would for any other overlord. These were accompanied by ghouls and wights and other darker things. At the Battle of Essen Ford, they crushed the Ottilia's armies and routing the Empire force. Before the battle von Carstein had promised the humans clemency if they surrendered and no mercy if they opposed him. He was as good as his word and his followers executed every captive before von Carstein reanimated their bodies.



As he watched his men slaughtered, the Ottilia's general, Hans Schliffen, became so incensed that he flew into a berserker rage, broke free from his captors, seized the count's own enchanted sword and struck off von Carstein's head. For his pains he was torn limb from limb by the count's followers. The remaining vampires, barring myself, took to squabbling among themselves to see who would take von Carstein's place. Herman Posner finally prevailed on the others.

That very night, as Posner strutted at the head of the army, Vlad returned. Posner claimed it was a trick and so von Carstein cut him down. This was not the first time this elusive count would come back unsummoned from the dead.

At the Battle of Schwarhafen, Vlad was cut down by Jerek Kruger, leader of the Knights of the White Wolf, and a full company of his men. Yet within a year Vlad von Carstein was leading another army and Kruger's smashed and bloodless body was found at the foot of the Middenheim spire. At the field of Bluthof, von Carstein fell with five lances through his body and the Count of Ostland's Runefang blade lodged in his heart. Three days later he was seen ordering the crucifixion of prisoners outside the town gates. At Bogenhafen Bridge a lucky cannon shot took von Carstein's head off. Within the hour, the cannon crew were dead and the village was being overrun. The soldiers of the Empire were gripped with terror in the face of so seemingly invincible a foe.

By the winter of 2051 the Sylvanians laid siege to Altdorf itself. The city had been surrounded by a ditch edged with sharpened stakes on the city wall side. The Reik had been redirected into the ditch to give the city a moat of fast flowing water. None of the precautions taken by the defenders worked. Nothing could stop our advance.

Giant catapults showered the terrified citizens with huge rocks and the body parts of

fallen comrades. Von Carstein gave his usual ultimatum — open the gates of the city and serve him while living, or fight on and serve him in death. The entire population including Ludwig, the claimant to the Imperial throne, wanted to surrender but the Grand Theogonist Wilhelm III convinced him not to. He ventured within the Great Temple of Sigmar and after three days of fasting and prayer emerged believing that Sigmar had revealed the salvation of the Empire to him. He knew the source of von Carstein's immortality.

That day he dispatched an agent to our camp. His name was Felix Mann, and he was the greatest thief of the age. He had been offered a full pardon and laid under a geas by the Grand Theogonist. He was required to steal Vlad's ring. By stealth and trickery Mann made his way to the heart of our camp. Heart in mouth, he entered the great black silk pavilion where Vlad lay sleeping on his bier. Mann believed that it was the arrogance of the vampires that caused them to post no sentries outside the pavilion. Mann slipped the ring from von Carstein's finger and fled, not returning to Altdorf. No one knows what became of him and the Carstein Ring. No one, that is, except I.

When he woke, Vlad von Carstein was enraged. He ordered an immediate attack on the city. The undead army surged forward. Great siege-towers wheeled to the walls. On the battlements of Altdorf the defenders stood ready. Halberdiers pushed the siege ladders away and dozens of walking dead fell, limbs flailing slowly, to the ground. Skeletons and swordsmen hacked at each other across the battlements. Imperial heroes armed with formidable magical weapons cut down the lesser of the vampire aristocrats and were themselves in turn cut down.

At the centre of this vast struggle, high above the city, the Grand Theogonist clashed with Vlad. It was such a battle as few had ever seen.







The two mighty champions exchanged blows and Vlad soon gained the upper hand. Sensing that the end was near Wilhelm leapt at his foe, accepting Vlad's blade through his chest even as he bore the vampire count over the battlements. The two fell locked together in an embrace of death. First Vlad was impaled on the wooden spike at the wall's foot and then Wilhelm landed on top, driving him still further on. With an awful scream the count expired for the final time, for without the power of his ring to resurrect him, none of his allies could get to his remains before the servants of the Empire.

With von Carstein gone, we Sylvanians were forced to retreat. Over half the vampires were dead, but so great were the casualties inflicted on the men of Altdorf that no pursuit was possible. Grand Theogonist Wilhelm was interred within the walls of the Temple of Sigmar and to this day men pray to his spirit when threatened by the legions of the undead. Within an iron-bound ebony treasure chest, in the tattered remains of the black pavilion, was discovered Vlad's copies of the *Nine Books of Nagash* and the *Liber Mortis*. These were hastily placed under lock and key within the Temple of Sigmar.

The last casualty of the Battle of Altdorf was Isabella von Carstein. Apparently unable to face eternity without her husband, she impaled herself on a stake and shrivelled to dust before the eyes of the would-be Emperor Ludwig and his bodyguard.

Ludwig would have used the time to press on into Sylvania and end the evil scourge forever but the forces of the other two claimants to the Imperial throne joined against him, fearing that he might use his popularity as the surviving victor of the siege of Altdorf to press his own claim to the throne. So the lords of Sylvania were granted an interval to recover their strength. I chose not to be a part to this process.

For a while, it was not entirely certain that they could do so. Among the vampires there was dispute as to who was Vlad von Carstein's heir. There were five surviving claimants for the title: Fritz, Hans, Pieter, Konrad and myself. All could claim to be von Carstein's get, since he had spread his curse to all of us but not one of us really had any better claim than the other. A vicious power struggle erupted as all of them but I claimed to be the true Count von Carstein. All came to bad ends eventually. Fritz was killed while attempting to besiege Middenheim. Hans was killed by Konrad after a quarrel over who was the toughest. Pieter was captured in his coffin by the witch hunter Helmut van Hal, a distant descendant of the infamous Vanhal who sought to atone for his predecessor's crimes. Konrad, however, survived.

Konrad von Carstein was completely insane. Even when he had walked amongst mortals he had the reputation of being a blood-mad butcher, cruel, merciless and insanely ruthless. For his pleasure he had once ordered every cat in his domain to be used as sport for his crossbowmen. On at least two occasions he had peasant villages put to the torch because he didn't like the smell. He tried his mother for the crime of having given birth to him without his consent and then had her bricked up in her own tower. Acquiring the power and immortality of a vampire did nothing to strengthen Konrad's already shaky grasp on reality. His reign of terror lasted nearly a century and caused his name to be used to frighten mortal children to this very day.

Lacking any skill at necromancy, he went about enslaving as many vampiric thralls and petty necromancers as he could, forcing them to do his insane will. Soon he headed a huge army that ravaged the length and breadth of the Empire. Where Vlad had always offered his opponents a choice between life and death, Konrad offered them a choice between dying



immediately and dying painfully. Where Vlad von Carstein had looked upon humans as cattle to be husbanded as a farmer would husband his livestock, Konrad looked on humans the way a cruel sportsman would look upon a herd of deer.

Indeed, Konrad was so vicious that he forced the three claimants to the Imperial throne to combine forces against him on two separate occasions. The first time was at the Battle of Four Armies, an inconclusive draw fought outside Middenheim in 2100. This battle was most noticeable for the infamous scene of treachery where Ludwig's son Lutwik and the Otilia of Talabecland treacherously ordered the assassination of each other during the fray. The only thing that stopped Helmut of Marienburg becoming Emperor was the fact that Konrad killed him. Even Helmut's son Helmar refused to accept his father's claim to the throne once he was a zombie under Konrad's control. The second time this happened was at Grim Moor where a combined army of humans and Dawi finally defeated Konrad in the spring of 2121. The Dawi hero Grufbad held Konrad down while Helmar impaled his father's killer with his Runefang, then hacked his body to pieces and ordered the remains burnt.

I was the last and clearly the most dangerous of all my predecessors. My subtle ambition and indomitable pride was, and is, only appropriate for one of my bloodline. It was I who planned the downfall of Vlad and it was I, not Sigmar who revealed Vlad's secret to the Theogonist and laid a glamour on the sentries to prevent them noticing Felix Mann. While Konrad ravaged the Empire, I travelled the lands of Nehekhara until I reached distant Lahmia, where I studied the art of necromancy to considerable depth. I returned to Drakenhof with a fund of lore and bided my time until I was sure of my power. After Konrad's death I became the undisputed ruler of the Sylvanian hosts but for



a full decade I did nothing, letting the various contenders for the Imperial throne think the Sylvanian threat was over and giving them time to fall out among themselves, which they duly did. Once the Empire was once more wracked by vicious civil war I deemed it time to strike.

My undead legions crossed the Sylvanian border in the depths of winter and marched through the snows to Altdorf, putting any villagers they met to the sword and adding them to the ranks of my army. In the infamous Winter War of 2132 I defeated several hastily assembled Imperial armies that attempted to block my path. Victory followed victory and rumour of my coming was enough to send villagers fleeing from their homes to freeze to death in the snow. My force reached Altdorf in late winter and I arrived to find the city battlements empty of defenders. Triumph filled me. Just as it seemed as if I was set to take the Empire's greatest city, Grand Theogonist Kurt III appeared on the battlements and began to recite the Great Spell of Unbinding from the *Liber Mortis*. Seeing my followers begin to crumble to dust I ordered a hasty retreat. Although I was probably the most



powerful of all my predecessors in my own way, my foes now seemed prepared to meet the threat I posed head on.

I marched my army down the Reik to Marienburg intending to lay siege to the port city but found my plan thwarted by the army of Marienburg and a company of Asur who had recently established a trading colony there. Among this elder race was the famous Archmage Finreir whose truly awesome power turned the battle against my force at the crucial moment. I resolved to settle down for a lengthy siege until my scouts revealed that an army from Altdorf was coming up fast behind me. Forced to lift the siege, I retreated back the length of the Empire. So began a long cat and mouse chase where neither side was entirely sure who was the cat. My army would be whittled away by armies

of the various Imperial states, only for me to gain a great victory.

Eventually I was driven back into the Sylvanian forests. Determined not to make the same mistake as they had before the desperate nobles of the Empire swore a truce among themselves and slowly but surely began to scour the Sylvanian woods. In this task they were aided by the damnable Dawi. Now united, the citizens of the Empire were relentless. Eventually I was brought to battle at Hel Fenn, where I was cut down by the Count of Stirland and a unit of his bodyguard, when I was separated from my entourage. I gripped tight to my steed, even as I felt my life slip away and I fell at the very edge of the great swamp and was sucked beneath its murky depths.

Naturally, Martin, Count of Stirland, claimed he had slain me single-handed and for this feat demanded all of Sylvania be added to his domains. Since no one else actually wanted the land, no one gainsaid him.

The citizens of the Empire declared the threat of the Vampire Counts was ended forever.

I tell you now, were it not for the easily manipulated mind of a petty necromancer by the name of Schtillman, I would still be beneath the mud and ooze of that swamp. Once again I am the undisputed lord of my domain, stronger than I have ever been in all my long life. The ravages of the barbarian lord Archaon has weakened the Empire and has shifted the eyes of humanity from the threat I rightly pose.

My strength is enough to raise and bind to my will servants enough to execute a major campaign against the northern marauders. Though I quit the field after that battle when faced with the resurrected Theogonist of Sigmar, I have since grown even more in strength, supping on the essence of the progeny of Neferata, Abhorash and even W'soran.

I am the heir of Vashanesh and my time is almost upon you.

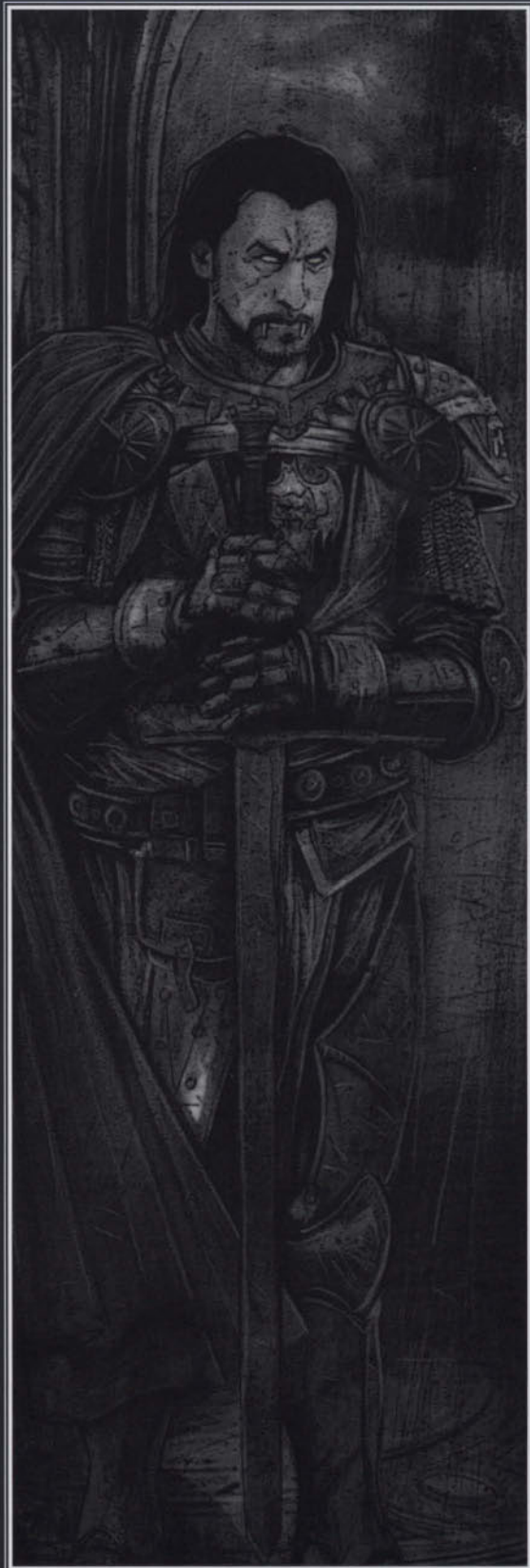




*Awake O Dead, for there can be no rest for ye beneath the earth.
Let the splintered bones burrow from the grave pall. Let cold fingers grip
time-worn blades, and unseeing eyes survey the fields of slaughter.
For your time has come once more.
And the dead shall walk.*



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